The Vine, Israel and the Church

PETER DAMIAN AKPUNONU

Studies in Biblical Literature | 51

The Vine, Israel and the Church

Studies in Biblical Literature

Hemchand Gossai
General Editor

Vol. 51

PETER LANG
New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
Frankfurt am Main • Berlin • Brussels • Vienna • Oxford

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Akpunonu, Peter Damian.
The vine, Israel and the church / Peter Damian Akpunonu.
p. cm. — (Studies in biblical literature; v. 51)
1. Viticulture in the Bible. 2. Metaphor in the Bible. 3. People of God—Biblical teaching. I. Title. II. Series.
BS665 .A39 220.6'4—dc21 2002005691
ISBN 0-8204-6160-1
ISSN 1089-0645

Die Deutsche Bibliothek-CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

Akpunonu, Peter Damian:
The vine, Israel and the Church / Peter Damian Akpunonu.
–New York; Washington, D.C./Baltimore; Bern;
Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Brussels; Vienna; Oxford: Lang.
(Studies in biblical literature; Vol. 51)
ISBN 0-8204-6160-1

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council of Library Resources.

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275 Seventh Avenue, 28th Floor, New York, NY 10001
www.peterlangusa.com

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Printed in Germany

To My Mother

Bernadette

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Acknowledgments

I thank the Lord who in his providence and mercy guided my steps to the University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary, to spend my sabbatical leave. To the Rector/President, Very Rev. John F. Canary, the Faculty, Staff, and Students of this noble and revered institution, the first University of the State of Illinois, I express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude for throwing its doors and facilities wide open to me, so that in its quiet, peaceful, and prayerful atmosphere, I could grow; the sky being my only limit. Their care, company, understanding, and friendship have made my days in the United States. I will never forget them.

To my mother, Bernadette, to all my family members, who at all stages of my life have given me unflinching support and unstinted love, I thank you all, especially my two brothers, Basil and Dama, who are here in the United States with their families. Your homes have always been a Bethany for me. I am immensely appreciative also of your financial and material support.

It was Rev. Dr. James Chukwuma Okoye, C.S.Sp, an Associate-Professor of the Catholic Theological Union of Chicago who encouraged and advised me to spend my leave at Chicago and worked hard to make it a reality. I thank you immensely, James, for I have been richly blessed by God for being in Illinois. God used Paul Ugo Arinze, now a priest of Madison Diocese, to direct my steps to Mundelein. I owe a lot to you, Paul, for your bold initiative at a turning point in my life. I thank also the Nigerian students at Mundelein especially Sanctus Kodilinye Ibe, also now a priest of Madison Diocese.

The Library of the University deserves special mention. The team worked cheerfully and tirelessly to provide all I needed—finding the books, inter-library loans and photocopying facilities: I wish to thank them for their company, sincere friendship, and support. To the Librarian, Hermann Peterson, and other Library Staff—Julie, Marian, Mary Ann (now the University's Registrar), Anna, Anne and Ed—please accept my sincere gratitude. Your friendship is deeply appreciated by my family members and other friends who called on me at the Library.

I single out for special recognition and appreciation, Susie, who typed my manuscripts and all other documents and made all the corrections at every phase of this work. Your hard work, patience, and dedication will remain forever green in my memory.

My sincere sentiments of gratitude and esteem go to Rev. Msgr. Anthony W. McGuire, the Pastor of Maternity of the B.V.M. Parish in Northeast Philadelphia, to the Associate Pastors, the entire Parish Staff, and personnel. I thank you all for welcoming me to the Parish all these years and making me happy and at home whenever I am with you. May God bless and reward you for your care and generosity.

To Professor Joseph Blekinsopp and Dr. Hugh R. Page Jr. of the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, I owe special gratitude for reading the drafts and making the necessary corrections. I am very indebted to Rev. Dr. Paulinus Odozor, C.S.Sp., a visiting professor of the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, for introducing me to the University and working so hard to ensure that this work sees the light of day.

To all my friends at home, in Europe, and in the United States; to the Congregation of Daughters of Divine Love; to all who in any way have contributed to this work—may you live forever in God's presence.

SHALOM SHALOM!!!
Peter Damian Akpunonu

Abbreviations

Cf	Confer
CL	Community Lament
ch	chapter
ed	edition; editor
LXX	Septuagint
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
Targ	Targum
TM	Textus Massoreticus
tr	translation; translator
Ugar	Ugaritic

Abbreviations of Titles of Books and Periodicals

AnBibl	Analecta Biblica (Rome)
AHw	*Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* ed. W. Von Soden
ANEP	*The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament* ed. J. B. Pritchard (Princeton: New Jersey, 1955)
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament with Supplement* ed. J.B. Pritchard (Princeton: New Jersey, 1969)
ATD	*Das Alte Testament Deutsch* (Göttingen)
AnOr	*Analecta Orientalia* (Roma)
ARM	*Archives Royales de Mari*
B-D-B	Brown F., Driver S. R., & Briggs C. A., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Oxford)
BH	*Biblia Hebraica* (Stuttgart)
BHS	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* ed. K. Elliger & W. Rudolph,1968.
Bib	*Biblica* (Roma)
Bib Or Pont	*Biblica et Orientalia* (Roma)
BK	*Biblischer Kommentar* (Neukirchen)
BWA(N)T	*Beitrage zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament* (Leipzig: Stuttgart)
BZAW	*Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Altestamentliche Wissenschaft* (Giessen; Berlin)
CAD	*The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*, 1956ff
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (Washington, D.C.)

EB	*Etudes Bibliques* (Paris)
EH	*Exegetishes Handbuch zum Alten Testament* (Münster
EvTh	*Evangelische Theologie*, Munich.
ExpT	*Expository Times*, London
GHK	*Hand-Kommentar zum Alten Testament* ed. N.Nowack.
GKC	*Gesenius Hebrew Grammar* enlarged by E.Kautsch (Oxford).
HAT	*Handbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. O. Eissfeldt
HAW	*Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft*, ed. W. Otto
HKAT	*Handkommentar zum Alten Testament* (Göttingen)
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
IB	*Interpreters Bible* (Nashville)
ICC	*International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh)
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible with Supplement* (Nashville)
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (Chicago)
KAT	*Kommentar zum Alten Testament* (Gütersloh)
Nov.T	Novum Testamentum
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
RB	*Revue Biblique* (Paris)
SVT	*Supplement to Vetus Testamentum* (Leiden)
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI)
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI)
UL	*Ugaritic Literature* (Roma)
UT	*Ugaritic Textbook* (Roma)
VD	*Verbum Domini* (Roma)
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (Berlin)
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

Editor's Preface

More than ever the horizons in biblical literature are being expanded beyond that which is immediately imagined; important new methodological, theological, and hermeneutical directions are being explored, often resulting in significant contributions to the world of biblical scholarship. It is an exciting time for the academy as engagement in biblical studies continues to be heightened.

This series seeks to make available to scholars and institutions, scholarship of a high order, and which will make a significant contribution to the ongoing biblical discourse. This series includes established and innovative directions, covering general and particular areas in biblical study. For every volume considered for this series, we explore the question as to whether the study will push the horizons of biblical scholarship. The answer must be yes for inclusion.

In this volume Peter Akpunonu explores in detail the biblical theme of The Vine with regard to both Israel and with implications for the Church. Akpunonu's approach is textually oriented and bridges with ease and sensitivity both the texts from the Hebrew Bible and those in the New Testament. While the author's aim finally is to draw theological implications, on the basis of his examination of the respective texts and themes, the journey to that end is done with meticulous and intentional care to the details and various trajectories. What we have at the end is a study that is thoughtful and one that is sure to provide insight for future study.

The horizon has been expanded.

Hemchand Gossai
Series Editor

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Introduction

The Canticle of the Vine (Isa 5:1–7), will strike even a casual reader of the Bible as a work of literary ingenuity. There have been so few texts of the Old Testament that have attracted such favorable and wonderful comments as the pericope. It is truly a gem. A researcher in prophetic studies, a preacher, will find himself returning times without number to this poem to draw inspiration from it and to be motivated as well. It is a key to understanding Old Testament theology.

The Canticle of the Vine has a beauty of its own. It excels not only in literary elegance but also in profundity of thought. The text is dense and limpid; so well written that it is extremely difficult to introduce a gloss into the well-constructed artwork. In fact, no word is wasted. With a masterstroke, it makes a rare and an enviable combination of literary craftsmanship and contemplation. It is, therefore, not surprising that the pericope has a doublet (Isa 27:3–5).

The Canticle has the singularity of condensing the Old Testament theology and the history of salvation into seven verses. The omnipotence of God, his Providence, Election, the Covenant, divine Retributive Justice, and his Fidelity are succinctly narrated and explicitly taught in this love song. Besides rehearsing the history of Israel, it interprets the vicissitudes of the nation, justifies the righteous anger of God, and condemns the nonchalance of Israel and her amoral attitude towards the covenant.

The Canticle of the Vine constitutes a turning point in biblical use and understanding of the vine. No longer considered primarily as a botanical object, as one of the prized products of the Promised Land, as a reward for right living, the vine has become a special symbol for Israel. This symbol began to be used in the eighth century as the canticle belongs to one of the earliest oracles of Isaiah of Jerusalem. Such understanding and use continued to the New Testament era. So important was the imagery that Jesus in one of his "I am" sayings did not hesitate to say: "I am the true vine" (John 15:1).

The vine, the botanic and also political-religious reality—took on a spiritual dimension which now needs to be studied from the perspective of the Promise and the Covenant.

The transition of the vine from "a choice plant" to "a choice nation" is very significant. In the New Testament, the vine came to designate both Jesus the Messiah and his Church. The metamorphosis, the style, purpose of viticulture, were all woven into salvation history.

These factors make the study of the vine not only interesting and worthwhile but above all its application to Israel and later to the Church more challenging. This is the gold mine we have set out to dig, confident that at the end of this research work, we shall come to a clearer understanding of what it means to call Israel, Jesus Christ and the Church, "THE VINE."

CHAPTER ONE

The Vine in Israel

The vine is one of the choice plants of Palestine. Together with the fig and the olive, it represents some of the great blessings of the Promised Land. The three are mentioned together in Jotham's diatribe (Judg 9:8–13) and also in Deut 8:8 where the land of promise is described as a land

> where you will eat bread without scarcity
> and would lack nothing.

Since the vine played such an important role in the life of the people of Palestine, it is not surprising that it is used in literature as a symbol of peace, blessing, fruitfulness, and joy.

1.1 Terminology

The Hebrew word for vine is גֶּפֶן *gephen* (Gen 40:9) and it is twice expanded to גֶּפֶן־הַיַּיִן *gephen-hayyayin* (Num 6:4; Judg 13:14) to mean "grapevine", a fruit which a Nazarite is not supposed to eat (Num 6:1–4). The choice vine is שֹׂרֵק *śōreq* (Isa 5:2; Jer 2:21) or שֹׂרֵקָה *śoreqâh* (Gen 49:11), whose grape is usually red in color. Often גֶּפֶן *gephen* and שֹׂרֵק *soreq* are parallel as in Gen 49:11; Isa 16:8, and Jer 2:21. Because שֹׂרֵק *soreq* is considered high quality, if not the best of grapes, it is [called זֶרַע־אֱמֶת *zēra'-'meth* "authentic fruit" and is contrasted with degenerate grapes סוֹרֵי הַגֶּפֶן נָכְרִיָּה *sôrê haggephen n°kriyâh* (Jer 2:21).

The Hebrew word for the vineyard is כֶּרֶם *kerem*. In 2 Kgs 18:31–32 it is synonymous with and in parallelism with גֶּפֶן and is listed with the fig tree, corn, wine, oil, honey, abundance of water, and better land, a land of greater blessings, into which Sennacherib promised to deport the Judeans, if they surrendered to him. It is in the vineyard that grapes are planted, nurtured, harvested, and occasionally pressed into wine or syrup (Isa 5:1–7).

Other terms relevant to our study are נָזִיר *nazîr* "undressed vine" (Lev 25:5, 11) "the vintage" (Lev 26:5). The "tendril" is שָׂגִיר *śāgîr* (Gen 40:10) while the "vine row" is שָׂרָה *sārâh* (Jer 5:10)

In cognate languages גֶּפֶן is found in Aramaic as גּוֹפֵן *gôphēn* or גֻּפְנָא in the Akkadian as *gapnu*[1] and in late Babylonian as *gupnu*[2]. It is found in Assyrian Royal Inscriptions of the eighth century.[3] The term is also found in the Ugaritic as *gpn* and has two possible meanings:

"vine" UT 52:9, 10, 11
"harness trappings", "packsaddle",[4] and this is found in UT 51:IV 5, 7, 10:12; 1 Aqht:53.
"gpn" and "ugr" are Baal's messengers UT 158:3 ; 2058: 20.
In Arabic it is found as *gafn* or *gifn*.[5]

In the Greek, the vine is ἄμπελος *ampelos* and the vineyard is ἀμπελων *ampelōn*. It does appear that a vineyard can be converted into an orchard or more specifically into a vegetable garden. Hence Ahab asked Naboth to give him his vineyard for a vegetable garden (1 Kgs 2:12).

1.2 Viticulture in Ancient Near East

The Bible traces viticulture to Noah. Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard (Gen 9:20). Despite this assertion, from the end of the 19th century, scholars have carried out special research on the vine right from ancient times. It was once believed that viticulture originated in the region of the Caspian Sea, spread over the Ancient Near East and was eventually brought into Greece and Italy by the Phoenicians.[6] Today this view has been largely replaced with the theory that viticulture developed independently in several regions of the Mediterranean Sea.[7] In Egypt, viticulture could be traced back to the fourth millennium B.C. But the vine did not flourish in Egypt because the soil was not very favorable to its growth. Occasionally the Nile would overflow its banks whereas too much water or excessive heat was not conducive to its growth. Although the vine was greatly appreciated in Egypt, it was not a daily commodity for ordinary Egyptians. The story of Joseph and the cupbearer (Gen 40:9–14) indicates how highly prized the vine was in Egypt.

In Mesopotamia, the soil was equally unfavorable to viticulture. Vine was found in the region but not in large quantity nor was the quality the best.

The vine found the most favorable conditions in Asia Minor, in the Mediterranean regions and especially in Syro-Palestine. Given the hills and collines, mod-

erate rainfall, clement weather without the excesses of heat and cold, these conditions made viticulture in Syro-Palestine prestigious, lucrative, and a matter of joy and pride.

That the vine was produced in large quantities in Syro-Palestine and Asia Minor is evident from some extra-biblical texts. In the sixth dynasty of Egypt, a career official, UNI by name, who was very active in the reign of Pepi (c. 2375), left an inscription now found on his cenotaph at Abydos where he described a major campaign against the Asiatics. From his narrative, it can be concluded that the expedition was successful for:

> the army returned in safety
> after it had hacked up the land of the (sand) Dwellers. . . .
> after it had thrown down its enclosures. . . .
> after it had cut down its fig trees and its vines. . . .
> after it had set fire into all its dwellings. . . .
> after it had killed troops in it by thousands. . . .
> (after it had taken troops) in it a great multitude as living captives.[8]

The text clearly indicates that there was abundance of vine, the destruction of which was meant to inflict punishment and to humiliate the conquered people.

Another Egyptian document of the Middle Kingdom (c. 1950 B.C.) tells the story of SI-NUHE, who returned from Asia and was made a courtier of the Egyptian King. Describing the country which bordered on Egypt he said

> It was a land named Yaa. Figs were in it and grapes. It had
> more wine than water. Plentiful was its honey, abundant
> in olives. Every (kind of) fruit was on its trees. Barley was
> there and emmer. There was no limit to any (kind of) cattle.[9]

In all these countries, not only did many make a prestigious and high standard of living from viticultre, the vine played an important and occasionally dominant role in the social and religious life of the people. There were cultic drinkings and libations. Among the Greeks, the cult of Dionysius was well known and celebrated in its usual baccanalian style.

1.3 Viticulture in Israel

Israel celebrated the fruit of the vine right from its earliest days. It was even called the "Feast of Yahweh" חַג־יהוה *ḥag-YHWH* (Judg 21:19; Lev. 23:16) or the "Feast of

Ingathering" חַג־הָאָסִיף *ḥag hā āsîph* (Exod 23:16) or simply "the Feast" הַחַג *ha ḥag* (1 Kgs 8:2; Isa 30:29; Ezek 45:23). It was celebrated in autumn at the end of the year (Exod 23:16; 34:22) and lasted seven days (Lev 23:34; Deut 16:13–15) and this feast continued into the New Testament times (John 7). It was one of the three pilgrimage feasts and the most joyful of all.

This feast was kept on the 15th day of the seventh month (Lev 23:39) and observed for eight days. On the first and the last days of the festival, the Israelites observed complete rest. On the first day, the Israelites collected palm branches, boughs of leafy trees and willows from the river bank and rejoiced in the presence of Yahweh for seven days. They lived in shelters to recall the days when they lived in shelters as they journeyed into the Promised Land. After the exile, the Israelites lived in shelters as they celebrated this feast.

The feast of the vine was found among the Canaanites and sometimes it included orgiastic features which later infiltrated into Israel. The daughters of Shiloh performed the traditional vintage dance during the feast at which Benjaminites carried off some of them as wives (Judg 21:21). This feature of occasional loose conduct continued into New Testament times and the story of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1–11) finds its natural context at this feast.

The vine was grown and produced large fruit in Canaan even before the Israelites settled there. When Moses sent some Israelites to spy the land of Canaan, they initially gave a favorable report of the land:

> They came to Wadi Eschol and cut down from there a branch
> with a single cluster of grapes and they carried it on a pole
> between the two of them (Num 13:23).

In Israel, on account of abundance of grapes, several places had names relating to viticulture, e.g. Abel-Keramim (Judg 11:33), Anab (Josh 11:21; 15:50), Beth-Hakkerem (Neh 3:14; Jer 6:1), Eschol (Num 13:23, 24; 32:9; Deut 1:24). Of the vine of Sibmah Isaiah speaks in these words:

> For the fields of Heshbon languish,
> and the vines of Sibmah;
> the Lord of the nations
> have struck down the branches,
> which reached to Jazer
> and strayed to the desert;
> its shoots spread abroad
> and passed over the sea. (Isa 16:8).

Viticulture flourished not only in Judah but also in the plains of Sharon and Jezreel

(1 Kgs 21:1); in Timnah (Judg 14:5); in Shiloh (Judg 21); and in Heshbon (Jer 48:33). In Syria, Helbon near Damascus was renowned for viticulture (Ezek 27:18) as well as Lebanon.

From the evidence of these texts, it is clear that Syria and Palestine produced not only large quantities of wine buy even more so, wine of very high quality. Therefore, the vine exercised tremendous influence on the political, economic, social, and above all religious life of the people. Consequently, we shall study in detail the planting, the nurturing, and the harvesting of the grapevine.

1.4 Planting of the Vine

On account of the high premium placed on the vine, care and attention surrounded the plant. Isaiah 5:1–7 gives an insight into some of the steps taken to ensure that the vine bore the desired fruit. As with many objects that play an important role in daily life, the Hebrew Old Testament has numerous expressions for the parts of the plant and for the fruits of the grapevine as well as things done in connection with its cultivation.[10]

To plant a vineyard, careful preparations were made. Excellent terrain was chosen, the soil dug up and cleared of stones (Isa 5:2) and the vineyard secured from danger. A stone wall or strong hedge was built not only to keep the enemies of the vineyard away—foxes (Cant 2:15), wild boars (Ps 80:14), and thieves (Jer 49:9) but also to keep safe within those working in the vineyard. Often a watchtower was built to oversee the safety of the workers and of the vineyard, and to warn those living within of impending danger. During the vintage, the harvesters and other workers lived in the tower.

The vine produced its best fruit when planted on a colline (Isa 5:2) where the contours provided excellent terraces. Vines were planted in rows from three to four meters apart. Being a creeping plant, it was allowed to trail on the ground (Ps 80:10, 12), but when it bloomed with its cluster of grapes, it had to be propped up 0.5—1.0 meter to prevent the grapes from rotting. But to ensure good produce, it was often raised higher than that, sometimes to climb trees or people's houses; a practice which gave rise to the adage "every one dwelt under his vine and his fig tree" (1 Kgs 5:5; 4:25; Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10). Hence Ezekiel could speak of a vine which:

> and stood
> "towered aloft among the thick boughs out in its height
> with its mass of branches" (Ezek 19:11).

Since the Bible speaks of people dwelling under their vine and fig trees, it may be presumed that the vine was often planted beside the fig tree and this is a common

practice of Palestinian Arabs today. However, trailing the grapevine on poles and trellises, a practice found in Egypt from time immemorial can be traced to Palestine only during the Hellenic period.[11]

The vine having been planted, blossoms פרח *pārah* and flowers נצא *nāṣā* (Isa 18: 5; Gen 40:10) in spring and its tendril, שריג *sārîg* appears (Gen 40:10). Then comes the tender grape, סְמָדַר *s^{e}mādar* (Cant 2:13, 15; 7:13). On the vine stalk hangs a cluster of grapes אֶשְׁכּוֹל *ešk*ôl (Num 13:23) as they begin to ripen about July. The technical term for "the grape" is עֵנָב *ʿēnaḇ* (Jer 25:5; Deut 32:14; Isa 5:2, 4; Num 6:3). The unripe grape is בֹּסֶר *bōsēr* (Isa 18:4; Job 15:33) which some enjoy to eat but which later sets teeth on edge (Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2). The full ripe grape is גֹּמֶל בֹּסֶר *bōser gōmel* (Isa 18:5) while the stunted grapes (always plural), stinking and worthless are בְּאֻשִׁים b'ušim (Isa 5:2, 4).

But to ensure a good harvest, the vine has to be pruned. Pruning, זמר *zāmar* (Lev 25: 3, 4; Isa 5:6) takes place before and after the vine has blossomed and for this the vine—dressers use pruning hooks. Pruning hooks were small sickle—shaped knives that could easily have been weapons originally but which could certainly be converted to such quickly, were an enemy to threaten.[12] The pruning hooks, מַזְמֵרוֹת *mazmerôth* (Isa 2:4; 18:5; Mic 4:3) cut off the non-fruit bearing branches. The consequence was that the remaining branches became stronger and produced more fruit (Isa 18:5; John 15:2). The dead branches were collected and burnt (John 15:6).

Pending on the weather and on the location, the grapes reached maturity between July and October and the main harvest was always in the autumn. The harvest (Judg 9:27; Jer 48:32) was always a joyful period and a celebration, full of dancing (Judg 9:27) and merriment

> For over your harvest and vintage the cheering has died away:
> joy and gladness have vanished from the orchards.
> No more revelry in the vineyards
> no more happy shouting:
> no more does the treader tread wine in the presses,
> the cheering has ceased. (Isa 16: 9b-10 Translation: mine).

1.5 The Harvest

The harvest takes place between the months of August and October. The yield depends on a number of factors—the quality of the vine, the terrain, annual rainfall, climatic conditions, harassment or not by thieves and wild animals. There is no way to predict the produce of the vineyard. However, on account of Yahweh's anger ten acres would yield a bath of wine (Isa 5:10), i.e. about six gallons of wine.

Nevertheless, huge acres of vineyard and abundance of vine are expressions of divine favor. The grapevine, its fruits, and the luxuries that they produce—grape juice, wine, grape honey, and grape cakes—are viewed positively as blessings from Yahweh. A good example is Gen 49:11–12; the blessing of Judah

v.11 Binding his foal to the vine
and his donkey's colt to the choice vine;
he washes his garments in wine
and his robes in the blood of grapes

v.12 his eyes are darker than wine
his teeth whiter than milk.

Judah, along with its military might is also so blessed with abundance that he could tether his donkey to the vine (even though the vine stalk was not strong enough to hold back the donkey) and could even wash his garments not in water but in high quality wine.

Abundance of grapevine was a special feature of the apocalyptic times. In No. 29 of Second (Syriac Apocalyptic Book of) Baruch we read:

> The earth will yield its fruit ten thousandfold.
> And on one vine will be a thousand branches,
> and each branch will produce a thousand clusters,
> and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes,
> and one grape will produce a *cor* of wine.[13]

The grapes were gathered by the reapers בֹּצְרִים *bōs^{e}rîm*. The verb, בָּצַר *bāṣar,* means "to cut off, make inaccessible, enclose"[14] but when used with עֵנָב *ēnaḇ*, it becomes the technical term for reaping grapes. A reaper, therefore, was בֹּצֵר *bōṣer*. The grape gatherers plucked the grapes with their hands. This is evident from Jer 6:9 and is confirmed by pictures from Egypt.[15] The use of the sickle to gather grapes is not found in the OT: in fact it is found only once in biblical tradition; in Rev 14:8.

But it was not possible to reap all the grapes all at the same time, either because some were not ripe enough or because of oversight. Going through the vineyard twice was done by the gleaners, עוֹלֵלוֹת *'ôlēlôth* (Judg 8:2; Isa 24:13; Jer 6:9; Mic 7:1). But the law forbade the gleaning of the vineyard. The left-over belonged to the alien (Lev 19:10), the fatherless, and the widows (Deut 24:21)

> You shall not strip the vineyard bare or gather the fallen grapes
> of your vineyard: you shall leave them for the poor and the alien
> (Lev 19:10).

When the grapes were gathered, one of the following could be done:

> the grapes could be eaten in their natural state;
> they could be dried and turned into raisins;
> they could be boiled down into a thick syrup grape;
> they could be pressed into wine.

1.6 The Wine Press

The wine press was occasionally built in the vineyard (Isa 5:2; Matt 21:33) but more often outside it. For pressing the grapes, occasionally very heavy stones were used. The grapes were carried in baskets or even on a yoke to the big wine press which consisted of two containers, one above the other, hewn out of solid rock (Joel 3:13; Isa 5:2). The grape-juice that exuded into the lower vat on account of the weight of the grapes and the stones was highly prized: it was the "new" wine, the "sweet" wine (Hos 4:11; Amos 9:13; Acts 2:13) and was kept separate from the juice pressed subsequently.

But the chief method of pressing grapes was simply to tread them by foot. The verb used was simply הלך *hlk* "to walk" (Num 13:15; Job 24:11; Isa 16:10). It was done by many people shouting and encouraging one another (Isa 16:19–20; Jer 25:30; 48:33) as their legs and loincloths became stained with juice. Hence we read in Trito-Isaiah:

> Why are your robes red
> and your garments like those who tread the wine press?
>
> I have trodden the winepress alone
> and from the peoples no one was with me (Isa 63:2–3).

His regret was not that he treaded the winepress or that his clothes were crimson with grape but that he treaded the winepress alone.

1.7 The Vine and Other Divine Blessings

The vine is not the only gift with which Yahweh blessed Israel. Other blessings include the fig tree, the olive tree, the grain of the field, houses, pomegranates, and water. Some of these gifts are found in pairs.

Vineyard and Houses—This represents the prosperity of cultivated land. Israel is

blessed with the land of promise which it possesses, develops and in which it lives in peace (Amos 5:11; 9:14; Zeph 1:13b; Ezek 28:26; Isa 62:21; Sir 2:4)

Vineyard and Fields—This is found in the Book of the Covenant (Exod 22:4) and in ancient narratives (Num 16:14; 20:17; 21:22; 1 Sam 8:15; 22:7; 2 Kgs 18:32) and in pre-exilic oracles (Isa 32:12). It is also found in post-exilic texts (Ps 107:37; Mal 3:11; Neh 5:4; Zech 8:12). The texts teach that Yahweh gave Israel the land and the fruits of the land to enjoy and to praise God for his munificence.

The Vine and the Fig Tree—The more common pairing is the vine and the fig tree (Hos 2:14; Joel 1:7; 2:22; Isa 34:4; Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10). It denotes the prosperity and above all the peace of the Promised Land.

The Vine and the Olive—This combination is rare but it does exist (1 Sam 8:15). It designates the prosperity of the land.

The Vine, the Fig, and the Olive—This is a rare combination. A classical example is Jotham's diatribe and the only other occurrence is Hab 3:17. From such rare occurrences it can be deduced that "the the vine, the fig, and the olive" is not a stereotyped formula, but the three mentioned together designate the richness and the blessing of the land.

Grapevine and Pomegranates—This is found in the Canticle of Canticles 6:11; 7:13

Fields, Seed, Vineyard, Fig, Pomegranate, Date, and Olive—are found in Num 20:5; Joel 1:11–12; Hag 2:19.

More combinations are found in Neh 9:25 to include fortified towns, fertile countryside, possession of houses, storage-wells ready hewn, vineyards, olive groves, and fruit trees. Here seven elements are found. But the most comprehensive is in Deut 8:7–9

> For Yahweh your God is bringing you into a good land
> of flowing streams, with springs and underground waters
> welling up in valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley;
> of vines and figs and pomegranates, a land of olive trees
> and honey, a land where you will eat bread without scarcity,
> where you will lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron
> and from whose hills you mine copper.

Here are enumerated some of the great blessings of the land and the vine holds pride of place among them.

1.8 Esteem for the Vineyard

The vine is highly treasured in Israel. It entails hard work, vigilance, patience, and endurance. That makes its fruit all the more joyful and prestigious.

The vine also brought a lot of revenue. Isaiah speaks about a thousand vines worth a thousand pieces of silver (7:23). The vineyard is to lie fallow on the Sabbath year (Exod 23:10–11; Lev 25:3–5). It was forbidden to sow other seeds in the vineyard:

> You shall not sow your vineyard with a second kind of seed or the whole yield will have to be forfeited, both the crop you have sown and the yield of the vineyard itself (Deut 22:9).

It does appear this regulation was not seriously enforced and later was abandoned, for in a parable of Jesus in Luke 13:6, we read:

> "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard."

Anyone who planted a vineyard and had not enjoyed its fruit was exempt from compulsory military service, like a man who had completed a house and not dedicated it, or a man newly married (Deut 20:5–8). In the case of the vineyard, we read:

> Has anyone planted a vineyard but not enjoyed its fruit? He should go back to his house, or he might die in the battle and another be first to enjoy his fruit (Deut 20:6).

To plant a vineyard and not eat its fruit is a sign of divine displeasure or even a curse (Isa 62:8; 65:2; Mic 6:15).

The vine is also used in a religious sense. The wife of the righteous man is like a fruitful vine and their children like shoots of the olive (Ps 128:3), whereas the wicked will be like the vine whose unripe grapes are shaken off or like the olive whose blossoms are cast off (Job 15:13). In Ezekiel 17, the allegory of the eagle and the vine is used for Zedekiah and the Davidic dynasty about to be overwhelmed by catastrophe. The use of the vine as love language—found in Canticles (2:13; 7:8, 9) is not as developed as other various images of the vine.

The vine was cultivated at every stage of Israel's history. Kings cultivated vineyards (1 Sam 8:14) and appropriated other peoples' (1 Kgs:21). During the Babylonian exile, only the poor were left behind in Judah as vine dressers and ploughmen (2 Kgs 25:12; Jer 52:16). When the exiles returned to Judah, this duty was taken over by foreigners (Isa 61:5).

1.9 The Poisonous Vine

The vine, though a cherished product of the land, does appear to have a species that is poisonous. It is called גֶּפֶן־הַשָּׂדֶה *g[e]phen h[a]śśādeh* , literally "the vine of the field" and its fruit is called פַּקֻּעֹת שָׂדֶה *paquoth śādeh* The poisonous vine is mentioned in 2 Kgs 4:39–40 and Mal 3:10:

> One of them (sons of the prophets) went out into the field to gather herbs; he found a wild vine and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and cut them up into the pot of stew, not knowing what they were. They served some to the men to eat. But while they were eating the stew, they cried out: "Man of God, there is death in the pot" (2 Kgs 4: 39–40).

Some of the blessings Israel would receive for paying its tithes is that at Yahweh's command, the locusts would not destroy the fruit of the land and the vine would not produce dangerous gourds (Mal 3:11).

Worthy of note too is the "Vine of Sodom" גֶּפֶן סְדֹם *gephen S[e]dom*, ἀμπελος Σοδόμων *ampelos Sodomon*. It is a vine with bitter clusters of poisonous grapes. It is an orange colored fruit with black powdery interior.[16] In Deut 32:32–33 we read

v. 32 Their vine comes from the vinestock of Sodom,
from the vineyards of Gomorrah;
their grapes are grapes of poison,
their clusters are bitter;
v.33 their vine is the poison of serpents,
the cruel venom of asps.

1.10 Destruction of the Vine

The vine, though a very cherished product, can nevertheless be destroyed deliberately. This is done very often in war (Jer 5:17) or by Yahweh as a sign of his anger and the result of divine judgement (Hos 2:14; Isa 7:23; 32:12; 34:4; 24:7, 13; Deut 6: 11; Ps 105:33, 78:47). Esteem for the grapevine is presumed even when its destruction is depicted as divine punishment.

But it is interesting to note that the Assyrian Empire, at the zenith of its power, even though it wreaked havoc and destroyed peoples, cities, houses, and even gardens, never mentioned once in its annals the destruction of the vineyard.

1.11 Wine

It would not be complete to write a chapter on the vine without studying "wine" in Israel and in the Ancient Near East. This is so because wine is first and foremost a produce of the vine. Because of its color, it is often called "blood of the grapes" (Gen 49:11, Deut 32:14; Sir 39:26; 50:15).

Certain localities were famous for their wine, e.g. Judah (Gen 49:10–11); the plains of Jezreel and Sharon (1 Kgs 21:1); Timnah (Judg 14:5). Shiloh and Gibeon were famous for production and storage of wine and this in part explains the vintage dance at Shiloh (Judg 20:21–22).Special attention should be paid to Gibeon.

Gibeon, modern el Jib, is an Arab village eight miles north of Jerusalem. It was excavated five summers between 1956–62 during which perfect identification was made based on etymology (*g b ' n*) and (*j b*) and the archaelogical finds.The Bible was silent about Gibeon from about mid tenth century to the beginning of the sixth century B.C. It was then that Gibeon not only flourished but reached the peak of her prosperity.

121 pieces of pottery and 56 jar handles each bearing inscriptions in archaic Hebrew letters were found. The usual formula of the graffiti is "Gibeon" followed by *gdr/ d* and one of the personal names—Azariah, Amariah or Hananiah Nera. Vats capable of holding 9.75 gallons of liquid were found in cellars of temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit. 38 of such cellars were discovered and this big winery provided wine which was sold to very many other places.[17] The 38 cellars could provide 50,000 liters of wine[18] These vats were sealed with a few centimeters of olive oil for storage in the underground wine cellar.

Gibeon was in big business of making and exporting wine. Grapes were gathered and pressed and the juice gathered into large storage jars and lowered into the wine cellars. When the wine had fermented and aged, the surplus was transferred to smaller jars which were labeled with the place name "Gibeon" and the name of the makers and sold. Stamped jar handles were found out some of which bore the royal stamp with place names like Hebron, Socoh and Ziph. The vats for export were capped with clay stoppers which were held in place by a cord attached to the two handles.

Gibeon was famous for its wine and it does appear that during the monarchy, when other cities and villages were much involved in the affairs of the king, the people of Gibeon quietly went about their business of producing wine. The wine installation at Gibeon was truly astonishing. Did Gibeon provide opportunities and facilities for harvest festival, for drinking as well as singing and dancing similar to what took place in Shiloh (Judg 21:10- 24)? Till the present day, el Jib is famous for her grapes.

Outside Israel, Hosea speaks well of the wine of Lebanon (Hos 14:8). Heshbon and Sibmah were equally famous (Isa 16:8; Jer 48:32–33), while Syria was world fa-

mous for its wine. Among the merchandise from Damascus to Tyre was wine from Helbon and Uzal (Ezek 27:18–19). The wine from Helbon was considered one of the top ten quality wines. It was so indicated in the library of Ashurbanipal and was said to be preferred to all others by the Persian kings.[19]

Wine was occasionally mixed with water which in certain circumstances was considered pleasant and as producing a sense of well-being (2 Mac 15:39). However, it could also be resented as adulterating the wine (Isa 1:22). More often it was mixed with some spices which rendered it more intoxicating, and was served at banquets (Prov 9:2, 5; Cant 8:2). Those who linger late over wine and keep trying mixed wines have woes, sorrows, strife, complaints, wounds without cause, and redness of eyes. Much drinking bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder and those who drink much see strange things and their minds utter perverse things. They are like someone who lies in the midst of the sea (Prov 23:29–34). Wine mixed with myrrh or gall was used as a narcotic and hence offered to Jesus to lessen his pains (Matt 27:34; Mark 15:23).

In ancient Israel, wine was part of the everyday meal. At the Passover, the Jews drank four cups of wine.[20] Wine was liberally provided at banquets. In fact the Hebrew word for a banquet was מִשְׁתֶּה *mišteh* , "a drink"[21], and shortage of wine at a feast would constitute a serious embarrassment to the host (John 2:1–10). Old wine was preferred because of better sedimentation and also because it was stronger (Sir 9:10; Luke 5:39).

Wine was often offered by an inferior to a superior, Abigail to David (1Sam 25: 18); Ziba to David (2 Sam 16:1). It was used to revive those who were fainting and were exhausted (2 Sam 16:2), and as medication (1 Tim 5:23) for dressing wounds (Luke 10:34).

Wine was an important aspect of the religious life of the people. It was one of the items brought for offering and used at sacrifices. Though libations were made to false gods (Deut 32:37–38; Isa 57:6; Jer 7:18), worshippers making pilgrimages to Shiloh (1 Sam 1:14–15; 24), and to Bethel (1 Sam 10:3) brought wine. Wine was offered to God often in combination with a lamb, fine flour, and oil (Exod 29:40; Lev 23:13; Num 15:7).

From the many and varied uses of wine, it was evident that the fruit of the grape was a great blessing. It was used at all important events in people's lives and of the nation. Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with wine during which he told his disciples that he would not drink of the fruit of the wine until he would drink new wine with them in the kingdom of his Father (Matt 26:29).The Jews always praised God for the fruit of the vine (Mishna: Berakoth,6.1).

Wine gladdens the heart (Ps 104:5) and cheers the gods and human beings (Judg 9:13) and was considered one of the good things created from the beginning for good people (Sir 39:25–26). A Jewish saying called it "the head of all medicines".

Attitude towards wine was both praised and condemned. Noah, called the father of viticulture, was drunk in his tent (Gen 9:20–21). Wine was treacherous (Hab 2:5), took away understanding (Hos 4:11), and led to debauchery and shamelessness (Hos 4:18). The story of Lot indicated what drunkenness could lead to (Gen 19:31–38). Micah complained about those who welcomed a "prophet" who "prophesied" about wine and strong drinks (Mic 2:11). Isaiah condemned priests who "reeled" and "staggered" under the influence of wine (Isa 28:7). Consequently while engaged in sacred duties, priests were forbidden to drink wine under the pain of death (Lev 10:9).

Wine was a "mocker" and strong drinks a "brawler" (Prov 20:1) and those who loved to drink much wine would not get rich (Prov 21:17). Deuteronomy summarized a degenerate son in these words:

> This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us.
> He is a glutton and a drunkard (21:20).

"When wine enters, counsel leaves", says Hiyya Rabba.(T. Sanhedrin,70a).

It was in reaction to excessive drinking and its consequences that the Nazarites took a vow not to drink wine or eat any produce of the vine (Num 6:3). Even the mother of a Nazarite was forbidden the grape (Judg 13:4; 7:14) and this was later expanded by the Recabites to include not building of houses (Jer 35:6–7). Paul taught that drunkards and other self-indulgent people would not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:10).

In later times, especially in the post-exilic period, opposition to wine decreased. Ben-Sirach was able to say:

> Do not try to prove your strength by wine-drinking,
> for wine has destroyed many.
> As the furnace tests the work of the smith,
> so wine tests the heart when the insolent quarrel.
> Wine is the very life to human beings,
> if taken in moderation.
> What is life to one who is without wine?
> It has been created to make people happy.
> Wine drunk at the proper time and in moderation
> is rejoicing to heart and gladness of soul.
> Wine drunk to excess leads to bitterness of spirit,
> to quarrels and stumbling.
> Drunkenness increases the anger of a fool to his own hurt,
> reducing his strength and adding wounds.
> Do not reprove your neighbor at banquet of wine,
> and do not despise him in his merry making;

speak no word of reproach to him,
and do not distress him by making demands of him.
(Sir 31:25–31)

The Jews have some interesting sayings about wine which would be worth repeating.

"Wine is an unreliable emissary
I I sent it to my stomach but it went to my head.

"The tree of which Adam ate was the vine,
since its fruit has caused the most wailing in the world."

"Wine cooleth man in summer's heat,
and warmeth him in winter's sleet."

The Jews approached wine with a great sense of humor. They had sayings suitable and appropriate for every occasion or situation.

Wine is also an image of God's punishment. God's anger on his people is expressed in terms of a cup of wine they drink and reel (Ps 60:3). To the wicked a cup of wine, foaming and well-mixed will be given which they will drain (Ps 75:8). Yahweh gives Jeremiah a cup of wrath for the nations (Jer 25:15). Babylon is a golden cup of Yahweh's hand; she makes all the nations drink; they drink and go mad (Jer 51:7). In Trito-Isaiah Yahweh is said to trample the nations in his anger and making them drunk in his wrath and pouring their blood on the ground (Isa 63:6).

However, abundance of wine is an expression of God' blessing. Hence Isaac in blessing Jacob prays that God may give him abundance of grain and wine (Gen 27:28). Joel, looking forward to the future assures Israel in Yahweh's words:

2:19 I am sending you grain, wine, and oil and you will
be satisfied. . . .

2:24 The threshing floors will be full of grain
the vats will overflow with wine and oil. . . .

3:18 In that day the mountains will drip sweet wine
the hills shall flow with milk

The twin themes, vine and wine, as symbols of fertility, well-being, and blessing on the one hand, and of debauchery and shame on the other hand run through the Holy Writ. It is evident from the texts that there is nothing disturbing about wine: it is its immoderate consumption that creates problems.

The vine is a choice fruit of Israel. It is one of the special blessings of the Promised Land. The wine was part of Israel at every stage of her history and it played a significant role in the history, cult, and social life of the people. Its importance and imagery continued into New Testament times. There are many teachings about the vine in the New Testament, the climax of which being Jesus calling himself the vine, the true vine (John 15:1). After the destruction of the second temple, the disciples of Rabbi Johann ben Zakkai at Jabneh were called "the Vineyard of Jabneh."[22]

CHAPTER TWO

The Canticle of the Vine (Isa 5:1–7)

The Canticle of the Vine is a literary masterpiece and a work of ingenuity. Here we meet the great Isaiah of Jerusalem; a poet, a teacher, and a theologian. The canticle is not only one of the artistic passages of the Hebrew Bible but of world literature. It is a classic illustration of Isaiah's inimitable style, a testimony of his wisdom, style, and techniques. It is an outstanding embodiment of the parabolic form which Isaiah adapts for his own purpose.

The style, though easy and simple, is noble and great. The content is down to earth, easy to follow but pregnant with meaning. Because the text is limpid, it is free of glosses and hardly needs any textual emendation. Not wasting a word, it also does not create unnecessary suspense to deliver the message. The prophet ably and amply demonstrated his command of Hebrew language and the pericope is a work of literary craftsmanship.

Indeed Isa 5:1–7 is a well-cut piece of literature. Sharply set off from the preceding and following sections, it is an independent artistic literary unit. The text is not limited to any meter. The ability to move freely and with mastery from one meter to another while maintaining an easy flow of words and melodies bespeaks mastery of Hebrew poetry. The jarring change of pace with the element of surprise and outstanding shifting perspective, is built into the basis structure and helps to heighten the overall effectiveness.[1] Truly Isaiah belongs to the golden age of Hebrew language. For Herbert

> the canticle of the vine is one of the finest and most powerful examples of a form of teaching of which many occurrences appear in the Old Testament and in the teaching of Jesus.[2]

Speaking along the same line, Renkens says

> The song is famous, and according to style and content, it is a jewel. It is world literature. A deeply human situation suddenly takes shape in a very locally colored occasional poem.[3]

The content of the poem cannot be disassociated from the style of the author: both form a literary unit.

> Here we have a skillfully constructed artistic tale, which has been designed to elicit the "gossipy" interest of the hearers and their sympathy, then finally the verdict on the villain.[4]

Jerusalem had never heard Isaiah speak in this manner. The background seems to be the Feast of Tents, the most joyful feast in Israel, sometimes called "the feast of Yahweh", חג יהוה *ḥag YHWH* (Lev 23:39; Judg 21:19) or simply "the feast" הַחַג *ha ḥag* (1 Kgs 8:2;Neh 8:14; Ezk 45:23). The canticle fits the context superbly. But Isaiah was neither a "kill-joy" nor a "spoil-sport"[5] in fact he seems to participate actively in the celebrations. He poses as a minstrel and asks his audience to listen to his song.

The skill with which this parable is presented stands out in that it begins with words associated with love songs. In the ears of his hearers, this would be particularly appropriate at the vintage season, which among the Canaanites, had fertility myths overtones; and in Israel, was an occasion for songs, joy, and merriment.

On this subject, Duhm says that the poet, having gained the attention of his listeners, suddenly throws away the mask and gives the prophetic message in a language no one could possibly forget.

> Nachdem er ihre Aufmerksamkeit durch die leichtgeschürzten Verse in Volkston, wohl auch durch entsprechende Musik, vor allem durch die gefesselt hat, wirft er die Maske ab und schließt mit kurzen prophetischen Sätzen die man nicht wieder vergißt.[6]

The introduction indicates the intention of the prophet to tell a story. By this formal introduction he gains the attention of his audience and tells the story in such a dramatic style that could not leave anyone untouched. The conclusion is obvious: what began as a love song ends up as a trial at which the hearers are invited to pass judgement. The verdict with its inevitable punishment is declared by the prophet, the justice of which is acknowledged by all as fully appropriate.

Just as Jesus narrates the parables of the Sower (Matt 13:4–9; Mark 4:3–9; Luke 8:5–8), and of the Darnel (Matt 13:24–30) and gives their interpretation in Matt 13:18–23; Mark 4:10–12; Luke 8:9–10 and in Matt 13:36–43 respectively, so does the prophet interpret his Canticle to his audience (v. 7).

But the interpretation must have sent a shrill through their spine of the listeners. The closest similarity to the interpretation is the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen as preserved in the Lukan tradition (20:9–19) where at the conclusion, the audience exclaimed "God Forbid", because they understood perfectly the implication and the application of the parable.

The Canticle is presented as a love song and reference to it is as a "love song" is an intrinsic element in its parabolic form. The love of the beloved for his vineyard is the key to understanding the Canticle. It is because of his love for the vineyard that he spared no effort in providing the very best for it. It is the frustration consequent on the indifference to the efforts made that paved the way for the verdict and to the eventual destruction of the vineyard.

The imagery of the vine is widespread in the Bible. Although Isaiah will always be remembered for the Canticle of the vine, it was Jeremiah more than any other hagiographer of the Old and New Testaments that used the imagery most. In the Bible we observe the following occurrences

vine	53 x
vines	23 x
vineyard	69 x
vineyards	52 x
vintage	hapax

Of these, the following occurrences are found in Jeremiah

vine	4 x
vines	2 x
vineyard	1 x
vineyards	7 x

Jeremiah used it especially in the context or perspective of reproach and condemnation of Israel (2:21; 5:10; 8:13; 12:10–11). A strong condemnation of Israel, with similar language and style is found in Jer 11:15–17. The strongest analogous comparison is found in Jer 2:21 where Israel , a שׂרֵק *soreq* , a shoot of soundest stock, has become a degenerate plant, a bastard vine, סוּרֵי הַגֶּפֶן נָכְרִיָּה *sure haggephen han kriyyah*

Isaiah proved to be a prophet, faithful to Yahweh. He was able to give divine message, sad and tragic as it was, without adulterating the word of God. He was able to keep his audience in suspense until the very end when he pronounced divine judgment. Above all his negative conclusion did not provoke adverse or polemic reactions as was the case with Jeremiah (Jer 7 & 26). To be able to pronounce divine judgment without becoming a *Gerichtsprophet* was rare in biblical tradition.

2.1 The Literary Genre

An important issue in the Canticle of the Vine is its literary form. Is it a metaphor, a parable, a love song, or an accusation speech? That it is a figure of speech, is accepted by all. That it should be interpreted as an allegory, is disputed. However, it should not be interpreted as an allegory by understanding the various steps in the cultivation of the vineyard described in v. 2 in terms of history of salvation. Hence it would not be correct to interpret the

the Hill	—	Land of Canaan
the Vine	—	Israelites
hoeing and clearing the ground	—	Expulsion of the Canaanites
setting the tower	—	Davidic Dynasty[7]

If the Canticle should be considered a "love song" in the formal sense, then the singer would be the bride or the husband of the beloved.[8] But the singer is the prophet and the relationship is between Yahweh and Israel. Consequently, it is not a love song, certainly not in the formal sense.

Scholars prefer to study the poem either as a parable or as an Accusation Speech. According to Vermeylen:

> Ces deux approches du poeme sont valables, chacune de point du vue propre.[9]

Viewed as a parable, the pericope would be unique in the entire prophetic tradition in the manner it denounced the culpability of Israel and announced divine punishment. It is so different from other oracles of doom characteristic of many prophets of the eighth to the sixth centuries.

Viewed as an accusation speech, it suffices to say that there are many contentious and polemic passages in the Bible. The language of law-court spreads through the entire OT tradition and is highly developed in the writings of Deutero-Isaiah, especially in his polemics against idols: chapters 40–46.

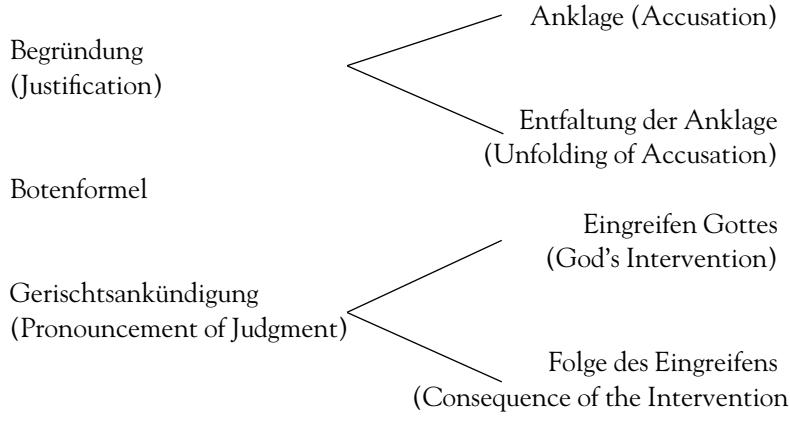
But such speeches go by different names according to various authors. H. Gressmann speaks about threats, DROHUNGEN; court pleadings GERICHTSWORTE; and invectives, SCHELTWORTE.[10] L. Koehler speaks about Disputations STREITGESPRACHE.[11] Claus Westermann distinguishes between Judgments—GERICHTSREDEN and Arguments—DISPUTATIONSWORTE.

The borderline between these various genres is not very neat: in fact it does appear that one genre is hardly distinct from the other. But Westermann, followed by the majority of scholars put these various genres under a generic name

GERICHTSWORT or to use the technical term of the Bible itself—**ריב** *RIḄ*. Hence scholars speak of RIB-FORMEL, RIB-PATTERN, GENRE DE RIB.[12]

Westermann makes a distinction between Judgment Speech against Individuals and Judgment Speech against Israel, and he considers Judgment against Israel a further development of Announcement of Judgment against the Individual.[13] The Canticle of the Vine would belong to Judgment Speech against Israel.

The basic structure of Judgment Speech against a nation (Gerichtswort an das Volk) is as follows[14]



Georg Fohrer who holds the same view says that the Canticle of the vine was structured as an Accusation Speech:

> Jesaja hat dieses sogennante Weinberglied als Gleichnis oder Parabel in dichterischer Form nach dem Aufbau der Anklagerede gebildet.[15]

Elaborating on the Accusation Speech, Fohrer notes that the Anklagerede—Accusation Speech—includes the following

- the affirmation of relationship in society imposing an obligation between the accuser and the accused;
- an account by the accuser of the way he has fulfilled his own obligations;
- complaint at the failure of the accused to honor his obligations;
- appeal to court for decision.[16]

Vermeylen considers the canticle a RIB too but structures it slightly differently:

- l'appel aux temoins prevus par la Loi (v. 3)
- le rappel des bienfaits octroyes par Yahveh a son peuple (vvlb—2; 4a)
- l'interrogatoire (v. 4)
- la declaration de culpabilité et le requisitoire (v 2b, 7b)
- la sentence de mort (vv.5–7)[17]

It does appear from the most recent studies that the literary genre of this pericope could be considered a RIB. However the style is fluid and lends itself to a variety of interpretations. The literary form depends to a large extent on the emphasis the writer or reader puts on one or any aspect of the poem—whether he considers it first and foremost a love song, a parable or a RIB. In any case, all the elements of a RIB are verified in the canticle.

Vermeylen also carried out a quick survey of some key words in the Canticle of the Vine. From his analysis of the text, he came to the conclusion that the key words were not typically Isaian but belonged to a later date.

> On admetterà neanmoique le vocabulaire caracteristique du "chant de vigne" n'est guere isaïen . . . c'est avec le livre de Jeremie et avec des texts de la fin de l'epoque monarchique et du temps de l'exil que nous avons releve le plus grand nombres de contacts.[18]

It has to be said that dating a pericope from the mere study of some words considered "key words" is not sufficient. Many other factors of scholarship, e.g. the events narrated, literary style, evidence of glosses, etc., shall necessarily come into play. This is all the more so when the author himself admits that the survey is "trop rapide"

> ce survol trop rapide ne permit de tirer des conclusions definitives[19].

There are a number of assonances in the Hebrew text of the pericope which add beauty and majesty to the text:

שִׁירַת	אָשִׁירָה
דּוֹדִי	לִידִידִי
כֶּרֶם	לְכַרְמוֹ
נאלִדִידִי	הָיָהלִדִידִי
כֶּרֶן	כֶּרֶן
בֶּן־שֶׁמֶן	קֶרֶן
מִשְׁפָּח	מִשְׁפָּט
צְעָקָח	צְדָקָה

In his overview of the text, Skinner considers the pericope "one of the finest exhi-

bitions of rhetorical skill and power which the book contains."[20] Delitzsch says

> the winged rhythm, the euphoric music, the sweet assonances of this appeal cannot be reproduced.[21]

Worthy of note is the recurrence of segholizations in the text which makes it easy to memorize.

The Canticle of the Vine brings to an end the introductory part of the book of Isaiah. If chapter one introduced the reader to the book as a whole, chapters 2—4 laid bare the enormous conflict between what Israel was called to be and what *de facto* it was.[22] Chapter five highlights the realities at the moment of Isaiah's teaching—syncretism in cult, idolatry, oppression of the poor, loose conduct, avarice, and infidelity to the covenant. Though the poem speaks of the final destruction of Israel, as yet Israel is Yahweh's pleasant planting.[23]

Chapter five is a good introduction to the Book of Immanuel. Here the drama of God's attempt to save his vineyard from utter destruction is played out in great detail. The Covenant, divine commitment to the Davidic dynasty, his messianic blessings—all these did little to stem the downward trend in Judah as it rolled headlong as though pre-determined to meet her doom.

Although Isaiah was called to the ministry in the year of King Uzziah's death (6:1), i.e. in 740 BC, the Canticle depicts a background prior to Uzziah's death, when every Israelite dwelt under his vine and fig tree (Mic 4:4). Uzziah with a long reign of at least forty years (781- 740), gave Judah another golden age in her history, similar to Davidic age. It was an era of prosperity and peace. Besides his military feats, Uzziah re-organized and modernized the army, extended the trade route as far as Elath and received tributes from conquered peoples.

> He built towers in the wilderness and hewed out many cisterns,
> for he had large herds both in the Shephelah and in the plain, and
> he had farmers and vinedressers in the hills and in the fertile lands,
> for he loved the land (2 Chr 26:10).

The achievements of King Uzziah are recorded in glowing language in 2 Chr:26. The Jerusalem Bible summarizes his feats in 2 Chr 26:15 as following:

> His fame spread far and wide: he owed his strength to a help
> nothing short of miraculous.

The effectiveness of this song presupposes a period of undisturbed peace and consequently before the Syro-Ephraimite war (734 BC). Hence Duhm thinks that the poem fits better into the early days of the ministry of Isaiah.

> Da das Bild vom Weinberg hier als unbekannt vorausgesetzt wird, da in später Zeit Jes. wohl allgemein, selbst den Landleuten, so bekannt war, daß ihm die Verkleidung nichts geholfen hatte, so verlegen wir die Parabel vom ungeratenen Weinberg wohl am besten in seine früheste Zeit.[24]

From the above arguments, we believe that the Canticle belongs to the earliest days of Isaiah's ministry when there was relative peace in Judah but also serious abuses to warrant the call of the prophet to insist on the holiness of Yahweh. It was meant also to warn the complacent Judaeans of the impending doom, which could be averted by following the teaching and the guidance of the prophet.

The question about the insertion of Isa 5:1–7 within its present context has not been given much attention by scholars. J. Vella considers 5:1–17 a homogenous unit comprising of three parts; Accusation (vv. 1–14); Confession of Sins (vv. 15–16); and Announcement of Salvation for the Remnant (v. 17).[25] This opinion cannot be sustained because 5:1–7 is undoubtedly an independent literary unit.

It would appear that the Canticle found itself in its present position because it was an early oracle of Isaiah and it was found a suitable introduction to the "woe" passages (5:8–24; 10:1–14). Moreover, as was earlier said, it was a suitable introduction to the Book of Immanuel.

Chapter five can conveniently be divided into three parts:

vv. 1–7	The Canticle of the Vine
vv. 8–25	The Woe Passages
vv. 26–30	Yahweh's summon to the invaders.

The Canticle in its turn can be subdivided into:

The Introduction—v. 1a
The Song—vv 1b-2 ; 3–4 ; 5–6.
The interpretation. v. 7.

This takes us then to the exegesis of the text.

2.2 The Text—Isaiah 5:1–7

1. Now I will sing for my loved one,
   my love song concerning his vineyard.
   My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside;

2. He dug it up, cleared it of stones
and planted it with choicest vines.
He built a watch-tower in its midst
hewed a wine press in it and expected it to yield grapes:
instead it yielded stunted grapes.

3. And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah;
judge, please, between me and my vineyard.

4. What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I did not do?
When I expected it to yield grapes;
why did it yield stunted grapes?

5. Now, I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will take away its hedge,
and it will be destroyed.
I will break down its wall,
and it will be trampled down.

6. I will make it a wasteland
neither pruned nor cultivated;
and it will grow briers and thorns.
I will also command the clouds
not to rain on it.

7. The vineyard of Yahweh Sebaoth is the house of Israel
and the people of Judah a plantation of his delight.
He expected justice but behold bloodshed;
righteousness, but behold cry of distress.

2.3 Textual Analysis

v. 1 אָשִׁירָה. The verb שִׁיר *šîr* is found 90 times in the MT, but appears only 6 times in prophetic literature (Isa 5:1; 26:1; 42:10; Jer 20:13; Ezek 40:44; Soph 2:14). It was in the period of Jeremiah that the verb was most used in prophetic literature. However, it occurs 25 times in the Psalter and 40 times in Chronicles. The noun שִׁיר *šir* appears 79 times out of which 12 times in prophetic literature. The plural

שִׁירִים *šîrîm* is found 36 times; 3 times in Amos (5:23; 6:5; 8:10) but always in the context of uncalled merriment.

אָשִׁירָה *'āsîrâh* is the volitive which in the first person is always a cohortative. It can either mean: "Let me sing" or "I want to sing": i.e. I have the desire or the intention to perform an action. The cohortative lays emphasis on the determination underlying the action and personal interest in it. It may stand alone or coordinated with another cohortative, frequently strengthened by another particle נא *nā* to express encouragement (Isa 5:1, 5) or to express a wish or permission to be allowed to do something.[26]

Here the prophet declares his intention to declaim a poem, to sing a song for the benefit of his audience. At the beginning of a poetic work in which God is praised, "I will sing" is often used (Exo 15:1; Judg 5:3; Ps 89:1; 92:1; 101:1; 108:1). לִידִידִי *lîdîdî* comes from the root דוֹד *dôd* "love". In the Assyrian it is dadu[27] and in the Ugaritic the basic meaning is "beloved one," "friend."[28] The word can also mean "uncle" (Lev 10:4; Num 35:11; 1 Sam 10:4; Esther 2:15; Jer 32:7). The tribe of Benjamin as a special object of Yahweh's predilection is called יְדִיד יהוה *y^{e}dîd YHWH* , "beloved of YWHW" (Deut 33:12) while Israel as a people is יְדִידֶךָ *y^{e}dideka* (Ps 60:7) and Judah is לִידִידִי *lîdîdî* (Jer 11:15).

לִידִידִי. יְדִיד *y^{e}did* occurs 8 times in the MT and twice in Isa 5:1. It is also found in Jeremiah 11:15 where the context is not only similar to our text, as the prophet compares Israel to "a green olive-tree covered in fine fruit", but we have the identical term לִידִידִי The noun from the same root דוד *dôd* "love," is found 60 times of which 40 are in the Canticles. The use of דוד in Ezekiel 16:8; 23:17; is important to our context for it discusses the infidelity of Israel despite the overwhelming love of Yahweh.

The word יְדִיד could easily remind the hearers of David and Solomon: David because of the root דוד and Solomon because of the name Yedidiah, given to him by Nathan (2 Sam 12:25). The root could be used to speak of a lover or a close, actual or assumed kinship.[29] With this hypothesis the canticle would then have much to do with the Davidic dynasty that is threatened with danger.

5:1a is subject to a variety of translations and this depends primarily on one's understanding of לדידי. If the *lamedh* is taken as *lamedh* of authorship, it would mean that Yahweh, not the prophet, is the author of the hymn.

> "Supponendo il significato del *lamedh auctoris*,
> il carme sarrebbe presentato come una composizione
> poetica di Dio stesso."[30]

It could then be translated as

> "I will sing the song of my beloved,
> a love song for his vineyard."

Yahweh would be called "the beloved" or in modern parlance, "darling."

"VINEYARD" AS EROTIC LANGUAGE. Besides the general understanding of *kerem* to mean a vineyard, some modern scholars e.g. H.- P. Muller think that the "vineyard" can be understood metaphorically and so used in love language. Relying heavily on the *Canticles*, especially on 1:6; 8:11f he says

> On the one hand, "vineyard" denotes the plot of ground that needs to be guarded or yields its fruit; on the other , it denotes the female body and its sexual charm.
>
> (Cfr "kerem, korem, karmel",TDOT, V11). 324

A more careful reading of the *Canticle* reveals that the book speaks about love and wine (1:2, 4; 4:10); the human body (1:13, 14; 8:8–9); mandrakes (7:14) which were supposed to be aphrodisiacs (Gen 30:14–16); the love between the bride and the groom consummated in the vineyard (7:13). The Benjaminites lay and ambush *in the vineyard* and carried off the daughters of Shiloh as they came to dance during the Feast of Yahweh (Judg 21:19–23).

Dodim (pl) means love but always sexual desire or its satisfaction (Ezk 16:18; 23: 17; Prov 7:18; Cant 1:2–4; 4:10; 5:1). Muller goes on to say that the identification of "vineyard" with the female body is an instance of the common identification of women with fields and the soil (Ibid, 324). He refers to the Ugaritic text KTU 1.24,22f, according to which the Moon-God, Yarih, seeks through coitus to make the goddess Nikkal's field " a vineyard, the field of her love , an orchard".

Pressing his point further, Muller places Isa 5:1–7; 27:2–3 and Jer 12:10 where Israel is called "the Vineyard of Yahweh" against love language. Yahweh is the lover and Israel is the beloved. He quotes an inscription from Khirbet al—Qom (brk. 'ryhw. lYHWH. w l'srth—*Blessed through YHWH and through his Asherah*). Also found are two jug inscriptions in Wadi Quraiya (Sinai): brkt 'tkm l'YHWH smrn wl'srth—*I bless you through Yahweh who protects us and through his Asherah* and finally

> brkt lYHWH . . . wl'srth—*I bless you through Yahweh and through his Asherah*

Some parallelism must be admitted. Hosea, a contemporary of Isaiah, though in the northern kingdom the covenant relationship between Israel and her God as a love relationship. The terms *yadid, dod* and *kerem* can be used to describe the way Yahweh can be said to relate to Israel.

However, such concept can hardly be conceived Isaian. It is radically opposed to Isaiah's understanding of God which depended heavily on his inaugural vision. Isaiah saw the thrice *holy* God seated on a high and elevated throne. *The Holy One of Israel* is transcendent and even when he speaks of Yahweh's deep love for Israel, his

language is not erotic. Moreover there is no Isaian text that would justify such interpretation. It would be remarkable that Isaiah should use such a term, even in a parable, for Yahweh. A prophet of another cultural background or of a different temperament might speak of God as "my darling" but not Isaiah for whom Yahweh is the "Holy One of Israel."[31]

Therefore we conclude by saying that the "Vineyard" of the *Canticle* and God's relation with Israel cannot be subjected to that manner of interpretation.

Consequently the text should not be translated as *lamedh auctoris;* rather the text has a better and clearer reading if translated:

> "Let me sing concerning my beloved,
> his love song for his vineyard."

The prophet would be filling the role of the friend of the groom, who interprets his will. Hence Heinrich says

> "Der Prophet ist nur Interpret für den anderen, dem dies gehört, weil es von ihm handelt. Der Prophet singt für diesen Freund und die Zuhörer sollen unter seiner Stimme die Stimme des anderen, des Freundes, hören. "[32]

The LXX translates:

> "I will sing to my beloved
> a love song for *m*y vineyard."

The Targum of Isaiah reads:

> The prophet said, "I will sing now for Israel—which is like a vineyard, the seed of Abraham, my friend—my friend's song for his vineyard."[33]

But the Targum is only a paraphrase. From the many possibilities of translations that we have briefly recounted, it demonstrates how 5:1a has attracted the attention of scholars.

But the song stems from a context that is real to life. The poet begins by declaring his intention to sing a song and this is welcomed by his audience. He then proceeded to say that it is a song for his friend concerning his vineyard. He did not force his will on his audience, hence the particle נָ which today could be translated as "please".

5.1b "My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside," literally "a vineyard there was to my friend on a horn, the son of oil."

קֶרֶן *qeren* means "a horn," a symbol of strength (Deut 35:17). It also means "a hill," "a peak," "an isolated hill."[34] The vineyard was on a hill and this hill he designates as a horn. To picture a mountain as a horn is not uncommon especially snow-capped mountains, e.g. Matterhorn, Schreckhorn.[35] It can also be a hill separated from the rest, the Alpine horns, e.g. Gabelhorn.[36] During the Crusades there was the famous battle of the "Horns of Hattin" on 3rd and 4th July 1187.[37]

שֶׁמֶן *semen* "oil," "fat." It is a symbol for affluence and plenty (Deut 2:13);used for medication (Isa 1:6; Luke 10:34); a sign of hospitality (Ps 23:5). Kings were anointed with oil (1 Sam 10:1; 2 Kgs 9:1, 3). To be full of oil can also mean "to be dull, unreceptive, insensitive" (Isa 6:10).

"Son of oil." Son בֵּן, *ben* בַּת *bath* are used extensively in the OT to express genealogy or relationship. When an intimate relationship exists between two persons or things, this is frequently expressed in father—son formula e.g. son of shame (Lev 10:5).[38] A few examples clarify the point

בֶּן-חַיִל	ben- hayil	1 Kgs 1:52	warrior
בֶּן-מָוֶת	ben- maweth	1 Sam 20:31	condemned to die
בַּת-בְּלִיעַל	bath- Belial	1 Sam 1:16 a	wicked woman
בֶּן- לַיְלָה	ben-laylah	Jon 4:10	grown in the night
בְּנֵי-רֶשֶׁף	b^{e}ne- reseph	Job 5:7	sparks
בֶּן-שֶׁמֶן	ben-semen	Isa 5:1	plenty of oil, fat, fertile

The vineyard is located on an isolated hilltop on a hill which catches all the rain, dew and the sun.[39] The image of Israel as a vineyard is dear to Isaian tradition and hence it is repeated in 27:2–4. Also, the vineyard is strategically located on a fertile plain, isolated and with very good weather conditions. That is an indispensable condition if it is to bear fruit.

v. 2 וַיְעַזְּקֵהוּ The verb עזק *ʿāzaq* means "to dig." It is hapax. In the piel it means "to dig around carefully."[40] The owner harrowed the soil, turning it over carefully so that the soil would be thoroughly prepared. This was usually done with the hoe, especially in areas the plough could not reach. The soil was dug thoroughly with the hoe, impressing on all the human effort invested on the project.

סקל וַיְסַקְּלֵהוּ *sāqal* means "to stone, to put to death by stoning," however in the piel it means "to clear of stone."[41] סקל occurs 22 times in the MT but only here does it have the meaning of clearing of stones. Piel, taken denominatively may express "to take away," "to root out," "to extirpate." Hence סְקֵל *siqqel* means "to pelt with stones," "to clear of stones."[42] Removal of stones is Piel Privative. Clearing of stones is an enormous laborious work especially in stony Judah. It is an essential task in a land where the limestone croppings helped to produce the fertile *terra rossa*. The stones would be piled about the perimeter of the field as a wall to keep out marauding animals. Those left over from the wall would be used later to build

the watch-tower.[43] The two verbs indicate intensity and the thoroughness with which the owner set about work in his vineyard.

וַיִּטָּעֵהוּ The verb נטע *nāta'* "to plant" occurs 59 times in the MT and usually takes two accusatives—the direct object and object of specification. The verb is a often used for the planting of the chosen people in the Promised Land (Exod 15:17; 2 Sam 7:10; Ps 44:3; 80:9; Jer 11:17).

שֹׂרֵק *śōreq* that was the species planted in the vineyard. The root שׂרק means "light red," "shew redness," "become red (like blood)." The adjective שָׂרֹק *śārōq* is "to have a ruddy tinge" (Zech 1:8). שָׂרֹק is also vine tendrils or clusters of red color (Isa 16:3).[44] It is also found in the Assyrian as *sarku* to mean "red blood."[45]

שֹׂרֵק was high quality grape, red in color, plumpy, juicy, and tasty. This high quality of grapes was found in many parts of Palestine especially in Judah. Samson encountered Delilah in the Valley of Soreq (Judg 16:4).

מִגְדֹּל *migdal* "tower." The owner built not a temporary booth but a tower, presumably from the stones gathered from the clearing of the ground.[46] The tower protected the workers not only from the weather but also from wild animals and from thieves. From the watch-tower, workers could be alerted about any pending danger. This was a wise way to ensure that the vineyard had a good yield.

יֶקֶב *yeqeb*—"a wine vat." The word is found 16 times in the MT. It is the lower part of a trough, often carved out of solid stone, and served to receive juice of grapes that had been pressed down or trampled on in the upper trough. From this wine-press, the juice flowed down into the יֶקֶב or wine vat. The digging of the vat was difficult because it was carved out of stone.

חָצַב *haṣeḇ* "to dig, cut out, hew, prepare." It occurs 25 times in the MT. It is a laborious and painstaking job.

There is a *crescendo* in the text. The owner dug up the terrain well, removed all stones, planted *soreq,* built a tower in the vineyard and went as far as to build a wine-vat there. All was done in readiness for a good harvest of grapes—in fact nothing was left out. He looked forward with eager expectation for a good harvest to justify his efforts and investment.

קָוָה *qawah* probably meant in the first instance "to twist," "to stretch," and later came to mean "the tension of waiting" and finally "to wait in eager expectation."[47] Instead of getting abundance of produce from the red high quality grapes, he got stinking grapes.

בָּאַשׁ bā'aš—"to have a bad smell, to stink."[48] It is found 17 times in the MT. In Aramaic, בְּאֵשׁ *b' eš* means "to be evil"—"to be bad," and the adjective בּאשׁ means "bad". In theAssyrian it is found as bisu—to be bad. [49] בְּאֻשִׁים appears three times in the MT, all in prophetic writings, Amos 4:10; Joel 2:20 and Isa 34:3 and it means a "stench" especially the stench of corpses.

בְּאֻשִׁים *bᵉušîm* is found twice in MT, always in the plural (Isa 5:2, 4) to mean "stinking worthless grapes." It should not be translated as "wild grapes" because wild

grapes grow on their own, untended. These are rather small, worthless grapes, inedible and which easily rot and stink.

This is the sad and calamitous unexpected result of the owner's labors. The grapes produced are not usable. The Arabs speak of grapes that are unfit to be eaten as "wolf grapes."[50] What an anticlimax!! What a disappointment!!! After his labors and care for the vineyard!!!

v.3 וְעַתָּה *w^{e} ʿattāh* But now. This introduces a new segment in the parable. It alerts the reader/hearer of a break or a shift. Hitherto the speaker was the friend, now the owner of the vineyard speaks. There is also a change in the literary form. Before it was a love song, at least of some sort, now it is a RIḆ.

"But now" of v. 3 prepares his audience for "but now" of v. 5. The addressee are the inhabitant (sg) of Jerusalem and man (sg) of Judah. This is collective singular, for the owner is addressing the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah as though an individual.

> The solemn official sounding designation of the audience as inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, and the sequence of which attests the pre-eminence of Jerusalem as the center of post-exilic Judaism.[51]

Those who dwell in Jerusalem are distinct from residents of Judah. The Jerusalemmites are mentioned first because they are at the administrative and religious center of the country, where decisions on the country are taken and where most of the iniquity is perpetrated. The men of Judah stand condemned too because they are not immune from guilt.

Though the literary genre is RIB, the text does not go to enumerate the crimes committed: probably they are presumed known. It is important to note that the owner, in spite of everything, continues to call the property "my vineyard." His love for the vineyard perdues despite everything.

v. 4 The owner asks two rhetorical questions. What more was there to do for his vineyard that he did not do? When he expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield stunted grapes? Certainly no rational explanation could be given. Heintrich says that in a situation like this no excuse can be given.

> Est ist ja ein ganz unvorstellbares widernatürliches Geschehen, was sich hier abgespielt hat. Es gibt keine Begründung, es gibt keine Entschuldigung.[52]

This pericope recalls an analogous episode: the parable of Nathan to David (2 Sam 12:1–7). Like David, the opinion of the audience was sought and if it gave the correct answer, like David, it would have condemned itself.

But the audience did not answer: in fact it is possible that the prophet did not give his audience the opportunity to make a statement on a matter that was so self-evident. "Sie sprechen schon das Gericht durch ihr Schweigen."[53]. Their silence is eloquent enough: they were tongue-tied in their guilt. Then with concise, precise style, typical of Isaiah, the prophet continues the parable.

vv. 5–6 This segment begins as in v. 3 with וְעַתָּה. Cheyne in his notes on Isaiah 5 in THE POLYCHROME BIBLE says:

> The parable takes the form of a song. As in 23:10; 27:2–5, the prophet assumes the character of a popular singer. From its dancing rhythm it might well be a dancing song that he gives us but the bitter irony of the close dispels the illusion. It was only to attract attention that Isaiah so disguised his earnestness, and he never did so again. If he accompanied his song with music, he must have changed his note at v. 3, and what an effect it must have produced when in the middle of the sentence (v. 6) he suddenly passed out of the lyric into a grave prophetic rhythm, and became no longer a singer but an orator.[54]

It is now time to pronounce the judgment which the audience had been reluctant to do or was not given the opportunity. The owner in terse unsympathetic language declares what he will do.

> I will remove the hedge so that the vineyard can be trampled underfoot.
> I will make it a waste-land, overgrown with briers and thorns.
> I will command rain not to fall on it.

This is not the voice of a complainant: it is the verdict of a judge. He has handed vineyard over to destruction.

But even in the irreversible judgment, there is the aspect of love and regret and this is evident in the particle נא. The owner is still aware that the vineyard is his, and had invested tremendously on it. He persists in calling it "my vineyard", vv. 3, 4, 5, each time he speaks in the first person. Though he is the one carrying out the destruction, he never loses sight that he is destroying the cherished work of his hand.

הוֹדִיע Hiphil ידע *yada'* with cohortative ending. He uses two infinitive absolutes, חַסֵּר *ḥaser* and בָּעֵר *ba'er* to indicate determination.

מְשׂוּכָה *mᵉśukâh* "hedge". The word is found only here and in Prov.15:19. The root שׂוּךְ *śûk* means "to hedge, fence up or about."[55] Another synonym is שָׂכַן *śākan* "to cover, lay over so as to screen" and the noun שֵׂךְ means "a booth, a partition" or

even "a thorn".[56] Another word used to secure a property is גָּדֵר *gader* , 14 times in MT, which is usually a stone wall or a fence (Num 22:24).

Every vineyard had to be protected from hostile forces especially animals, e.g. foxes and wild boars (Cant 2:15; Ps 80:13) and human predators. In fact the vineyard often had double enclosure.[57] But with no wall or hedge, cattle and wild beasts enter unhindered. "When a property has no fence, it is open to plunder" (Sir 36: 25). It will be worthwhile to quote here a text of Isaiah.

> In that day every place where there used to be a thousand vines
> worth a thousand shekels of silver, will become briers and thorns.
> With bows and arrows men will come there for all the land will
> be briers and thorns; and as for all the hills which used to be hoed
> with a hoe, you will not come there for fear of briers and thorns;
> they will become a place where cattle are let loose and where
> sheep tread (7:23–25).

In fact much of the treeless character of Palestine is due to the grazing off of unprotected young shoots by goats.[58]

The hedge is used figuratively for divine protection (Job 1:10). To hedge in can also mean "to hem in, to cramp in." In Job 3:23 and Lam 3:7, it means to constrict in such a way that there is no escape. Micah complaining of the total corruption of Judah says

> The best of them is like a brier
> the most upright of them a thorn-hedge (7:4)

Other terms which need to be attended to are the following:

> פרץ *pāraṣ* " to break through, break into, burst open"
> מִרְמָס *mirmas* "trampling place, trampling." It is found seven times in MT, and comes from the root רמס *ramas* "to trample."
> וַאֲשִׁיתֶהוּ בָּתָה I will make it a waste or destruction. I will make an end of it.
> בָּתָה *battah* "end, destruction". It is hapax.
> בַּתָּה *battah* precipice, steep.[59]
>
> I will make it a steep, a place of thorns and briers. Haupt suggests pointing it as בַּתָּה *battah* from the root בתת *bathath* which means "to cut, be cut off, to sever, decided, ended."[60] In the Assyrian it is butturu.[61]

With the fence and the hedge removed, the property was no longer secure, and the vineyard would no longer be tended. As soon as animals ate up the vine and

other young shoots, thorns, thistles, and brambles would grow and choke up what was left of the vine and indeed of any vegetation. This verse echoed the curse of the earth consequent on man's fall since in reward for his labors, the earth would yield thorns and thistles. (Gen 3:18).

Thorns, thistles, and briers are indications of God's anger. In particular they are punishment for the man who makes his living from the earth. It is not possible to cultivate a land overgrown with thorns and brambles. Cattle and herds do not find nourishment on the terrain. The growth of thorns and thistles is consequent on the abandonment of the land. The land then becomes a waste, a steppe, neither pruned nor cultivated and where nothing grows.

> זָמַר *zamar* to prune—is found three times in MT, twice in Lev 25:3,4 and here.
> עָדַר ʿ *adar* to hoe—is found twice in the Hebrew bible, Isa 7:25 and here.
> שָׁמִיר *šāmîr* brier—eight times in MT.
> שַׂיִת *ṣayith* thorns—seven times in MT.
> שָׁמִיר וְשַׂיִת *samir wʿ šayith* is found only is Isaian corpus; 5:6; 7:23, 24, 25; 9:17; 27:4 and in inverse order in Isa 10:17. שָׁמִיר alone is found in 32:13. The once fertile land, the once "son of oil" can produce only thorns and thistles.

v. 6 "I will command the clouds not to rain on it."

The identity of the owner of the vineyard is gradually unveiled. The issue is not the identity of the person who produces rain; rather it is that he *commands* the clouds to produce rain or not. Thus the prophet categorically asserts that the owner of the vineyard is Yahweh himself. Here the progression in the development of ideas is second to none.

Rain—מָטָר *māṭār*—90 times in MT, is a great blessing (Lev 26:4;Deut 11:11, 14; 2 Sam 23:4) Deserving special mention are the early rains and the latter rains, i.e., the autumn and the spring rains (Jer 5:24; Joel 2:23; James 28:22; Jer 2:6). In Deut 28:12–13 we read about some of the punishments to unfaithful Israel which includes:

> The sky over you shall be bronze and the earth under you iron.
> The Lord will change the rain of your land into powder and only dust shall come down upon you from the sky until you are destroyed.

When Saul and Jonathan fell in battle on Mount Gilboa, David sang this elegy over them:

> Ye mountains of Gilboa
> let there be no dew or rain upon you
> nor the upsurging of the deep
> for there the shield of the mighty was defiled (1 Sam 1:21).

In Ezek 22:24 we read

> "You are a land that has had no rain or shower on the day of anger."

Scarce rainfall is compensated by abundance of dew which in its turn is a great blessing (Gen 27:28, 39; Deut 33:13; Prov 19:12; Dan 4:15). Yahweh blessed Israel in these words:

> "I will be like a dew to Israel" (Hos 14:15),

and when there is neither rain nor dew, there is drought (1 Kgs 17:1).
Yahweh has occasionally withheld rain in punishment:

> I will withhold rain from you
> when there were still three months to the harvest;
> I will send rain on one city
> and send no rain on another city.
> One field would be rained upon
> and the field on which it did not rain withered (Amos 4:7).

The importance of rain is borne out by the sheer different names that it bears:

גֶּשֶׁם *gešem* "rain, shower." 35 times
מָטָר *mātār* "rain, downpour." 18 times
מַלְקוֹשׁ *malqôš* "latter rain, spring rain." 8 times
מוֹרֶה *môreh* "autumn rain, early rains". 3 times
דֶּלֶף *deleph* "dripping of rain." 2 times
זֶרֶם *zerem* "flood of rain, rain storm, heavy shower." 9 times
יוֹרֶה *yôreh* "early rain." 3 times
שְׂעִירִים *śe'rîm* "showers of rain" (hapax)
רְבִיבִים *rebibim* "copious shower." 6 times
שֶׁטֶף *šeteph* "flood." 6 times

The most common terms are גֶּשֶׁם *gešem* and מָטָר *matar* which are used in a general sense whereas מוֹרֶה *moreh* and יוֹרֶה *yoreh* indicate the essential first rainfall of

the season and מַלְקוֹשׁ *malqôš* the latter rains, often lighter rains, but nevertheless important rainfall which help to swell the grain.[62]

The great blessing of rain is aptly described in Ps 65:9–13

v. 9 You visit the earth and water it,
you greatly enrich it;
the river of God is full of water;
you provide their grain,
so you have prepared it.

v. 10 You water its furrows abundantly,
settling its ridges,
softening it with showers,
and blessing its growth.

v. 11 You crown the year with your bounty;
the tracks of your chariot drip with fatness.

v. 12 The pastures of the wilderness drip,
the hills gird themselves with joy,

v. 13 the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,
the valleys deck themselves with grain,
they shout and sing together with joy.

Because rain is so great a blessing, other gifts are compared to rain. Hence God "rained" down manna from heaven (Ex 16:4; Ps 78:24) and "rained" meat as well (Ps 78:27). Disaster could also rain down from heaven, e.g., fire and brimstones on Sodom (Gen 19:24) and on the wicked (Ps 11:16; Luke 17:29).

Consequently to withhold rain is to withhold life itself and the effect of such action is felt all through creation. With the vineyard not pruned, hoed nor cultivated and above all without rain, that was the end; that was the בתה *battah* of the vineyard.

v. 7 This is the climax of the pericope. The prophet led his audience pedagogically to the message for which he had been preparing them.

> Die Steigerung hat ihren Höhenpunkt erreicht, nur muß der Schlag herniederfahren.[63]

If some of the audience did not understand the application of the parable, the prophet left them in no doubt as to the meaning and the application of the canticle. "The time for poetry is past; the time for interpretation and application has

come."[64] In terse phrases, made more telling by paronomasia, he unveils and drives home the awful portent of his parable.[65]

The Vineyard	—	House of Israel
Owner	—	Yahweh Sebaoth
Garden of Delight	—	Men of Israel

The owner had his just expectations but the yield was so different from what he had hoped.

He expected *justice*.	—	He received *bloodshed*.
He expected *righteousness*.	—	He received *cries of oppression*.

With the secession of Jeroboam I, the Davidic kingdom was split in two: Israel to the North, Judah to the South (1 Kgs 12:16–24). Israel was used to designate not just the Northern Kingdom but the entire covenanted people without any reference to the schism. This is to understand "Israel" in the religious sense.

For Isaiah the secession was a national catastrophe of unparalleled dimension. It went contrary to Israel's *Heilsgeschichte* especially to Yahweh's promise through Nathan about the permanence of the Davidic dynasty (2 Sam 7:5–16). It made nonsense of the temple, a rallying point of all God's covenanted people, especially as syncretistic cult, idolatry and even apostasy was found in other rival sanctuaries of the North. The secession was such a tragedy that Isaiah wanted nothing of its kind or proportion to repeat itself in Israel's history.

> Yahweh will bring on you, and on your people and on your ancestral house, such days as have not come since that day Ephraim departed from Judah (Isa 7:27).

Isaiah remained attached to the Davidic dynasty and to the temple where he received his call. Isaiah did not recognize the Northern Kingdom and rarely did he call it "Israel," (7:1) but referred to it rather as "Ephraim" (7:9, 17). Yahweh was the God of the entire people hence that glorious epithet so dear to the Isaian tradition: "The Holy One of Israel."

Isaiah had many reasons for opposing the secession. He was from Judah. In the Northern Kingdom kings were not appointed by Yahweh as should happen in every theocratic state, for the appointment of kings was a divine prerogative; instead there were many political, social, and religious abuses in the secessionist state which set out to prove the impropriety of the schism. In cult, there was the appointment of priests not from the family of Aaron (1 Kgs 12:31). Jeroboam I set up rival sanctuaries in Bethel and Dan (1 Kgs 12:29 & 30) and syncretism in cult prevailed (v. 28). Kings were chosen and slaughtered at will (2 Kgs 15:8–17:1). It was accompanied

with oppression of the poor and shedding of innocent blood (1 Kgs 21:1–16) and general apostasy under Ahab and Jezabel (1 Kgs 16:29–33). Human sacrifice was also practiced (v. 34). Hosea condemned idolatry in Israel while Amos condemned social injustice in that state.

The earlier prophets did not countenance the secession either. For Amos, Israel was "the whole family that I brought out of Egypt" (Amos 3:1). Cfr. Mic 6:1–4.

The Canticle of the Vine is one of the early oracles of Isaiah. Ephraim as a kingdom was still standing: the disaster of 722/721 had not overtaken Ephraim. Consequently Israel should be understood in a religious sense. The oracle though uttered in Judah, and more probably in Jerusalem, would appear to be a warning to Ephraim and a lesson to Judah.

Therefore, the vineyard of Yahweh Sebaoth was the house of Israel, the entire covenanted people. But even then, Judah had a privileged place—it was Yahweh's plantation of delight.

שַׁעֲשֻׁעִים *ša'ᵃšuyim* -delight. Plural only and 9 times in MT. **נֶטַע** *neta'* means "plantation, plant". Though the verb **נָטַע** *nata'* is found 59 times in the MT **נֶטַע**, the noun is found 4 times; 3 times in Isaiah 17:10, 11 and here and once in Job 14:9. Judah was beloved of Yahweh and the object of his delight. This was founded on the Promise, confirmed by the oath to the Davidic dynasty, kept alive by the temple which was the abiding presence of Yahweh among his people.

In Isaian tradition, there is a very close bond between righteousness and the planting of the people for the glory of God:

> Your people shall be righteous,
> they shall possess the land forever.
> They are the shoot that I planted
> the work of my hands
> so that I might be glorified (Isa 60:21).

In another text we read:

> They will be called oaks of righteousness
> the planting of Yahweh, to display his glory (61:3).

There is similarity with Isa 1:21:

> How the faithful city
> has become a harlot,
> She that was full of justice!
> Righteousness lodged in her
> but now murderers.

Righteousness is a gift of God. In the messianic oracle of the Righteous Branch (Jer 23:5–6) the text says that Yahweh will raise a righteous branch for David, who will reign as king, and execute righteousness and justice in the land. Because of his wise and just rule, Judah will be saved and Israel dwell in safety. Yahweh who will bring this to pass will be called יהוה צִדְקֵנוּ, *YHWH ṣidqenû*"Yahweh our righteousness".

Though the Canticle of the Vine was declaimed in Judah, for the inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, the poem was directed first and foremost against the Northern Kingdom. She, more than Judah, stood in greater need, not only on account of its moral depravity but above all because of the resurgent great Assyrian Empire under Tiglath—Pileser III (745—727). Ephraim more than Judah was threatened. It can be said that this was a timely warning about the destruction of Samaria.

The owner of the vineyard is Yahweh Sabaoth. The full name יהוה אֱלֹהֵי צְבָאוֹת יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִים *YHWH ᵉlohe sᵉbaoth yōšeb hakᵉrubim* i.e., "Yahweh God of hosts seated on the cherubs." This name is absent in the Pentateuch and is used from the time of the Judges especially in Samuel, Kings, Psalms, and Chronicles. It is used by the prophets especially Isaiah and Jeremiah and by the three post- exilic trio: Haggai, Zechariah, Malachy.

The name was used with the Ark of the Covenant especially in Samuel. It has been widely discussed whether the Ark was used as a palladium (1 Sam 4). Be it as it may, it was used in the context of wars for it was Yahweh who led his people to war and to victory.

It does appear that the more correct understanding of the name was—God who ruled over all forces in the tripartite division of the Universe—the heavens, the earth, and Sheol. It was a title to designate God as the Almighty Lord and Master of Creation. This understanding fits in perfectly with our text. It is Yahweh who by his Almighty power now *commands* the rain not to fall on the vineyard. God's action of withholding rain is found a number of times in biblical tradition (Jer 3:3; 1 Kgs 17:1; 1 Kgs 8:35).

After the choice of a fertile hill spot, clearing of stones, digging the soil, planting *soreq,* and giving the vineyard all the care and attention it needed; the owner was confident of a very good yield. Rather instead of justice, מִשְׁפָּט *mišpaṭ,* it produced bloodshed מִשְׁפַּח *mišpaḥ;* instead of righteousness צְדָקָה *ṣᵉdāqâh,* it produced cries of oppression—צְעָקָה *ṣᵉʿāqâh.* Play on words can hardly escape detection. The great Isaiah is at work.

Concrete result of holiness is external justice with fellow human beings: but here instead of love, the extreme opposite is found—bloodshed. It is to be noted that there is no greater evidence for hatred than bloodshed. Instead of cries of joy consequent on right living, there are cries of oppression.

Justice is righting wrongs, bloodshed is inflicting wrongs. Righteousness is right living and right relationships, but cries and screams indicate wrong relationships and the anguish of oppression.

The assonance would seem to indicate that the worthless grapes bore at least outward resemblance to the good ones. The sounds were similar, almost indistinguishable but the reality was utterly different. Judging from the externals, Israel still appeared to be the chosen people, but in reality it was faithless as it broke the covenant bond. It was the difference between holiness and iniquity, life and death, the covenant and apostasy.

Israel's destruction was deliberately not mentioned. In fact it was not necessary, for once the equation between Israel and the vineyard was made, the impending judgment was inexorable.[66] Sin was not only the inability to rise to the good but also the perversion of the good.

Verse 7 brings the Canticle to an end. What began as a happy song, a love song, ends with judgment of doom, leaving the audience downcast and disorientated. The three Infinitive Absolutes disclose the determination with which the destruction has been decreed; it is an irrevocable decision. Hence Heintrich says:

> Darum ist dieses Liebeslied Totenlied, darum muß die Freude umschlagen zur furchtbarfter Klage.[67]

It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31) for God is a consuming fire (Heb 12:29; Cfr Isa 33:14).

The Canticle was followed by the Seven Woes. That redactional arrangement was probably meant to indicate that Ephraim was unrepentant and consequently destroyed. The destruction of Ephraim is spoken about in Chapter 17 but Ephraim did not heed the warnings of the prophet. Rather rolling in drunkenness and revelry, Yahweh cast down to the earth with violence, the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, the fading flower of its glorious beauty and trod its glory underfoot (Isa 28:1–4). The same fate awaited Judah if she continued to engage in syncretistic cult and oppression of the poor.

As Israel's election was compared to the preparation for and the plantation of the vineyard, so the destruction of the vineyard was the destruction of the people. It was the undoing of the work, the undoing of the vineyard.

Election was a gift not a privilege nor was Israel set apart for self exaltation: rather Israel, the *soreq,* was planted to bear rich fruit. Some conclusions which can be drawn from the Canticle are as follows:

> God's promise to Abraham led to the planting of the people in the land of Canaan. That was the basis for the Sinaitic covenant and for other future covenants.

- Election was meant to yield fruits of righteousness.
- Divine husbandry can be thwarted by inner degeneracy.

- Apostasy, impenitence, and refusal to accept God's love through the teaching of the prophets may bring about the withdrawal of God's favors and protection.

The Canticle of the Vine is a masterpiece. It is the foundation of other important texts on the vine not only in Isaiah but in other biblical traditions especially in Jeremiah and in the Psalter. In the NT, Jesus had many parables and teachings on the vineyard; Matt 20:1–16; 21:28–32, 33–43; Mark 12:1- Matt 20:1–16, 21:28–32. Matt 21:33–43 has its parallel passages Mark 12:1–12; and Luke 20:9–19. Another important text is Luke 13:6–9. The climax is found in John 15:1 where Jesus publicly declared; ἐγὼ εἰμι ὁ ἀμπελος ὁ ἀληθινὴ *ego eimi ho ampelos ho alethine* "I am the true vine".

CHAPTER THREE

Psalm 80

Introduction. Psalm 80 is one of the psalms of Asaph; pss 50, 73–83. It follows naturally Ps 79:13, another psalm of Asaph, which ends with these words:

> so we your people, the flock of your pasture
> will give you thanks for ever.

The psalm has a lot in common with Ps 79 as we shall see later.

This psalm is a community lament. It is an earnest, urgent prayer to God, the Shepherd of Israel, to turn around and restore to his favor battered and distressed Israel, whose life, as it were, hangs in a balance. It prays for the restoration of Israel to its pristine privileged position. Weiser believes that the psalm could have been recited at a joint celebration of cult at the central shrine of the confederacy.[1] The prayer song of the community is addressed to Yahweh; to rouse himself, to come forward and to make an appearance.

It seems that the psalm was used on a national day of penitence and prayer.[2] With the exception of *Yom Kippur,* fasts were not fixed on any specific day of the liturgical calendar. The peculiarity about fasts and laments is that they do not occur regularly. Rather they are proclaimed and spontaneously observed whenever a crisis sends out a clarion call—a drought perhaps. a plague, an enemy attack, a disastrous defeat or the destruction of a city or a sanctuary.[3] Only God, enthroned on the cherubs, can intervene and save the situation.

This psalm poses some theological problems. It contains no expression of penitence or sorrow, no assessment by the congregation of its past and present conduct. The prayer does acknowledge that the distress of the congregation is consequent on divine wrath; however, it does not complain that God's anger is unjust.[4]

The lament begins at the point where the trouble has its origin: God's relationship with his suppliant people. Whatever is plaguing the people can be traced back to God. Every statement in vv. 4b-6 begins with "You . . . You . . . You . . . ." The complaint is directed against God and Westermann says that accusation again God

is the nerve-center of all lamentations in the Psalter.[5] The lament is directed to the one, who as Creator, permitted suffering to come upon his creatures, and who could have prevented it, if only he wanted. The laments of the OT search for the cause of suffering, not in some power hostile to God but in God himself and in himself alone.[6] It addresses God, the actor of the congregation's experience of suffering and of salvation, and pleads for God's resumption of his earlier works of salvation as a means of restoration.

However, behind all these lies faith and confidence in the power and mercy of God; the God who is willing and able; the God who saved, who saves and will continue to save. That God will save is as certain as day: otherwise what would be the purpose of the prayer?

3.1 The Historical Background of Psalm 80

I have rarely studied a biblical problem that has such a variety of opinions as the historical setting of this psalm. It is not easy to document and synthesize the wide range of opinions of scholars for the past 150 years on this subject. No such attempt will be made especially as it falls outside the scope of this work. Nevertheless, a short survey is necessary, for without it, a sound exegesis of the psalm would be wellnigh impossible. Moreover, it is necessary to put the psalm in its *Sitz im Leben* to grasp the full meaning and message of the psalm.

There are certain indisputable facts about this psalm:

- it is a lament of the community
- Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh seem worse off than other tribes
- a good part of the territory has been overrun by the enemy, subjecting the people to humiliation, intolerable hardship, mockery and ridicule
- God appears deaf to the prayers and entreaties of the people and indifferent to their hard lot.
- God is requested to bestir himself and save his people.

To study satisfactorily the historical background of this psalm, some questions need to be asked:

- When was the psalm composed and what were other circumstances of its composition?
- Was it a prayer of the northern tribes for restoration from Assyrian captivity or was it a prayer of the Southern Kingdom for restoration of the kingdom of Judah after its fall?

- Was it a post-exilic prayer for the restoration of the nation as in the days of King David?

The opinions of scholars fall into three main groups:

- those who see events of 733–721 BC, the period of Assyrian expansionism, as the historical context:
- those who opt for a Judean origin of the psalm and date it to the post-exilic period:
- those who date it as late as the Maccabean period.

3.1.1 The Period of Assyrian Expansionism

From the content, it is evident that Israel was facing a national catastrophe which threatened its very existence. The sub-title of the LXX, ψαλμὸς ὑπερ τοῦ Ασσυρίου, *psalmos hyper tou Assyriou* though not found in the Hebrew, is a scribal attempt to contextualize the psalm and a witness to an oral tradition which associated the psalm with the Assyrian threat which culminated in the destruction of the Northern Kingdom.

M. Dahood believes that the mention of Israel in v. 2 and of the northern tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh in v. 3, proves that the psalm was composed in the Northern Kingdom shortly prior to its destruction in the catastrophe of 721 BC.[7] This is also the opinion of F. Delitzsch.[8] E. König says that the mention of Ephraim indicates that it is the Northern Kingdom that is in question, probably in the days of Tiglath-Pileser

> Die eigenartige Beziehung dieses Gedichts auf Ephraim usw begründet das Urteil, daß der Dichter auf eine Katastrophe des Königsreichs SAMARIA blickte. Denn denkt man natürlich sofort an den Einmarsch der Assyrer unter Phul in Israels Gebiet, so weißt darauf auch schon die in der LXX gegebene (2 K 15:19) überschrift, "betreffs des Assyrers" hin.[9]

Otto Eissfeldt holds to the northern origin of the psalm because Ephraim Benjamin and Manasseh are clearly mentioned

> Daß die Nennung von Israel und Joseph, von Ephraim und Benjamin und Manasseh ein deutliches Zeichen für die Bezugnahme unseres Psalms auf Nordisrael darstellt, ist allgemein anerkannt.[10]

He dates it about 732–722 BC, because of the sub-title and more so because of the divine name *Yahweh-Sebaoth* which he says originated in Shiloh.[11] A. Weiser thinks that probably only the period preceding the downfall of the Northern Kingdom comes into question since the Rachel tribes, Joseph and Benjamin, are mentioned.[12]

W. O. E. Oesterly says that with the specific mention of Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh, it is the Northern Kingdom that the psalm is concerned with. Moreover, v. 17 seems to contain a play on Benjamin's name. The conditions are those of the Northern Kingdom after 721 BC as described in 2 Kgs 17:18. Worthy of note is the reference to the wild beasts.[13]

Anderson thinks that the complete lack of any reference to Judah may suggest that the psalm was of northern provenance, though the motive need not have entirely altruistic, for the collapse of the Northern Kingdom would remove the last barrier between Judah and the tidal waves of Assyrian invasions.[14]

3.1.2 Judean Origin of the Psalm

Others like E. König, H. Schmidt and H. J. Kraus believe that while the event belonged to the Northern Kingdom, the prayer originated in the South. For König, the menance of the Northern Kingdom was a cause of concern and prayer for Judah.

> Der Bedrängnis der nördlichen Stämme Israels war selbstverständlich auch für die Patrioten in Juda ein Gegenstand der Trauer and des Fürbittenden Gebets.[15]

Hans Schmidt put the event not only in Israel but even a hundred years earlier—to the period of the Aramean wars, 1 Kgs 22:29–38,—because Israel needed the assistance of Judah not politically but in cult. Indeed it was a period

> . . . . in der man auch in Jerusalem wegen Gefährdung und Wiederstandsunfähigkeit des Nordreichs in Angst war. Die lange Zeit der Aramäerkriege, in den Juda dem Nordreiche zeitweilig geradezu Heeresfolge geleistet (vgl = B 1 Reg 22:29) wäre zu nennen.[16]

Kraus says that from v. 2, it is clear that the reference is to a serious threat to the northern Israelite group of tribes in central Palestine: Ephraim, Benjamin, Manasseh. Ps 80 also indicates that Israel uniformly belongs to the past.[17] He made room for the possibility of dating the events of the psalm to the time of Josiah who crossed the border into the territories of Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh,[18] but even Kraus himself had problems with his own opinion.[19]

P. Giuchou thinks that after the destruction of Samaria in 722 BC Hezekiah tried to use the favorable circumstances to effect a unification of the two kingdoms. He believes that the psalm belongs to this period; hence he says:

> Le present psaume . . . presente la priere suppliante des Israelites echappes au massacre et de la deportation refugies en Juda; ils pressent Dieu de retablir les tribus du Nord dans leur conditions normales en ramenant tous les deportés et fugitifs sous le sceptre d'l'homme de son droite.[20]

E. Beaucamp considers the possibility of the composition of the psalm in Jerusalem, because the reform of Josiah aroused interest towards the restoration of the kingdom of David in its totality

> On sait en effet l'interet que suscite, lors de la reforme de Josias, la restauration de l'ancienne royaume de David dans sa totalité.[21]

For M. Goulder, there has been natural reluctance to exclude Judah from the psalm which he believes must have been used in Jerusalem. "You have fed *them* . . ." is a hint that Judah was praying for her brothers.[22] A. F. Kirkpatrick aligns Ps 80 with the prayers of Jeremiah and Ezekiel for a united Israel and dates the psalm about 570 BC, during the exile.[23]

3.1.3 Post-exilic Composition of the Psalm

W. M. L. de Wette thinks that this psalm has affinity with Pss 74 and 79.

> Wahrscheinlich bezieht sich dieser Ps auf denselben Verhältnisse wie Ps 74, 79.

However he was prepared to date the psalm to the Maccabean period especially as it expressed some hope for restoration of the United State of Israel.

> Ephraim Benjamin, Manasseh bezeichen das ganze Volk: das gerade Stämme genant werden ist vielleicht dichterische Willkur doch liegt in der Erwähnung der Stämme Ephraim und Manasseh der Wunsch, daß beide hälfte des Reichs, Juda und Israel, wieder hergestellt werden sollen.[24]

J. Olshausen dates the psalm to the Maccabean period. In it he saw a remnant with a very strong desire for the restoration of a united kingdom of Israel. Benjamin represents the South, Ephraim the North and Manasseh the Trans-Jordania.[25]

3.1.4 A Tradition—Historic Interpretation

W. Beyerlin turned away from the purely historical-geographical approach to a tradition-historic interpretation. According to him vv. 2–3 is the oldest stratum of the psalm dating probably from the pre-monarchical era. The communal lament, vv. 5–7 17b–19, was integrated to vv. 2–3 by the use of the refrain in vv. 4, 8 and 20 and this was done probably in the reign of Josiah when there was concern for the distressed, occupied northern territories. The vine passage vv. 9–17 is an allegorical interpretation added to the psalm now comprising vv. 2–7, 17b-20 and this was done after 587. Hence the opinion that the psalm originated after 587 is not groundless.[26]

The problem is very complex and the diversity of opinions among scholars does not make the solution any easier. Nevertheless, scholars complement and enrich one another with their different opinions. Consequently to understand and assess the historical background of this psalm, certain points should be borne in mind.

The psalm is a prayer, תְּפִלָּה, *t*^{e}*phillah*, and a lament of the community. It would be incorrect to imagine that this psalm used only once in Israel's history. Such a beautiful psalm would fit into many historical vicissitudes and its frequent use in cult would with time, blunt the rough edges of meticulous and historical exactitudes.

The title, ὑπερ τοῦ Ασσυρίου, is an oral tradition which was later documented. Like other psalms with titles, especially those attributed to David or referring to certain events in David's life, e.g. Pss 2, 7, 17, 34, 52, 54, 57, 59, 60, such traditions should be subjected to unmitigated exegetical scrutiny. A more reliable criterion would rather be the study of the content of the psalm.

The psalm, even if composed in the Northern Kingdom, was used in the South and it was from the sanctuary in Jerusalem that we received the psalm. This alone lends itself to later additions to the psalm.

These notwithstanding, it does appear that the events of 732–721 BC gave rise to the composition of the psalm. It was brought to Juda about 721 BC or later and preserved in the temple in Jerusalem, and was used in cult. The divine name, *Elohe Sebaoth*, which originated in Shiloh, is a glorious epithet for Yahweh in the Jerusalem sanctuary. Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, in his book, *In Search of God*, gave impressive arguments to show that Yahweh Sebaoth is a title par excellence for the God of Israel in the Sanctuary in Jerusalem.[27]

There is no convincing argument to date the psalm to the Maccabean period. This theory has not been supported by scholars this century and so can be regarded as overtaken.

The application of the psalm to the events of 1 Kgs 15:29; 1 Kg 22:29 as suggested by H. Schmidt is inconclusive.[28] The language of the psalm is not detailed enough to warrant such identification.

Dating the psalm to the reign of Josiah is problematic. It is undisputable that King Josiah made serious efforts to unite the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. He wanted to restore the allegiance of the Northern Kingdom to the Davidic dynasty which Yahweh had promised would last for ever. (2 Sam 7:5–16). However during his reign, Israel was not threatened by any outside forces especially as Assyria was battling for her life. Consequently this psalm hardly fits into the reign of Josiah.

The intercessory prayer, "the man of your right hand, the man your right hand has strengthened" gives the impression that the monarchy was still in existence. That man was to pilot the affairs of the kingdom now in distress.

To conclude, it would appear that the events of 732–721 BC gave rise to the composition of the psalm. It can hardly be dated earlier than that. The psalm, if composed in the Northern Kingdom, was brought to the temple of Jerusalem about or soon after the fall of Samaria. It was from the sanctuary in Jerusalem that we received the psalm. But constant use was made of the psalm and so created room for some additions. The frequent use blunted the rough edges of historicity.

3.2 The Literary Genre of the Psalm

Ps 80 is without doubt a Community Lament (CL), VOLKSKLAGELIED. It reflects a tragic condition, a desolate situation which promises no immediate change, except by divine intervention.[29]

Cries of lament and plea for help, are neither new nor recent in Israel's history. They can be detected early enough in the cries of the children of Israel in the desert (Exod 17:1–7; Num 14:1–9). In the period of the Judges, it was a cry of anguish and distress in the face of oppression by foreign nations. In response to these, God sent a JUDGE to judge his people, and deliver them from their enemies (Judg 3:7–18:21; 10:1–16:31).

> The people's cry in the wilderness belongs here so that the first beginnings or forerunners of the CL must reach back into the time of Israel's wandering in the desert.[30]

A special characteristic of the community lament is that it is always a cultic action. In fact no worship observance in ancient Israel is as well known as the rite of lamentation. It is always preceded by a national crisis, e.g. war, drought, plague, victory of the enemy, threat of annihilation.

The community was summoned and no exception was made for women and

children: even nursing children were brought (Joel 2:16). Food and water were forbidden to all, even to animals (Jonah 3:7; Jdt 4:10). All had to be purified by fast (Joel 1:14), put on garments of mourning especially sackcloth (Isa 22:12; Jer 4:8; 6:26; Jdt 4:10), sprinkle dust and ashes on their heads (Josh 7:6; Neh 9:1), and rend their garments (Joel 2:13). The priests and the ministers of Yahweh weep before the vestibule and the altar (Joel 2;17; 1 Mac 7:36–38) and the people weep before the Lord (Judg 20:23–26).

The Psalter does not exhaust Israel's laments for many are found in other sacred books. Community Laments are found in 1 Chr 20:5–12; Isa 59:1–20; 63:7–64:11) while some examples of the Laments of the Individual are 1 Sam 1:19–27; Tob 3:2–6, 11–15; Jdt 9:2–14; the prayers of Mordechai and Esther (Est 4:17a-z); 2 Kgs 19:16–19 and Daniel (Dan 3:24–45).

3.2.1 Structure of the Lament

Ps 80 is considered such a classic example of a Community Lament that Claus Westermann uses it as a paradigm for the genre.[31] Its structure according to Westermann is as follows:

Address
Complaint
Confidence
Petition
Vow of Praise[32]

The *Address* invokes God and sometimes has an introductory petition. The *Complaint* contains what Westermann calls "accusation against God," "we-complaint" and complaint about enemies.[33] *Confidence* emphasizes trust in God based on his wondrous deeds of the past, his promises, the covenant. The basis for appeal to God is his loving kindness, חֶסֶד *ḥesed* , amply demonstrated in his salvific deeds of the yester years. As he intervened and saved in the past, so will he once again. In the *Petition*, the suppliants turn to God and implore him to come to the rescue and sometimes it contains petition against the enemies. It usually ends with a *Vow of Praise*.

Though this is the basic structure of the genre, the component parts have no fixed sequence, primarily because they are spontaneous prayers said in varying historical circumstances. Consequently any section can appear more than once in the psalm.

3.2.2 The Refrain

Ps 80 is unique because of the triple refrain which occurs in vv 4, 8 and 20. V. 15 is similar but nonetheless a different invocation. This led Oesterly to conclude that

v. 15 was an abbreviated form of the refrain[34] while some even suggested a reconstruction of the refrain and the restoration of the "original order of strophes" in which the refrain was introduced after v. 11. Oesterly said it is natural to suppose that a similar line stood after v. 10.[35] It may not be easy to justify the introduction of the refrain after v. 11 especially as such a manipulation of the text is not supported by any manuscript. Moreover, it would disturb the flow of the metaphor of the vine. Above all, complete symmetry cannot be achieved merely by inserting the same refrain after v. 11 since as Oesterly himself says, vv 14b-19 contain only five lines instead of six.[36]

We believe that the psalm should be left as it is because there is not sufficient critical grounds to alter the basic characteristics of this psalm merely on alien viewpoints. The problems posed are not insurmountable and will be studied when the text will be analyzed. It can be said with a great measure of certitude that v. 15 is a deliberate variant and not a corruption of the text.

The refrain is more probably a response by the attending community as it punctuated the prayers of the psalm. Even though with time the refrain was used to divide the psalm, originally it served a different purpose: it was the response of the people.

3.2.3 The Meter

The meter for the most part is 3+3 but in the refrain of vv 4, 8 and 20, it is 2+2+2. V. 15 presents a special difficulty as most probably it was not meant to be a simple repetition of the refrain but a deliberate variant.

It is only in vv 9–20 that Israel is called "the vine." A detailed study of Israel as the vine will be done in the exegetical part of this chapter.

3.2.4 Similarity with Other Psalms

There is noticeable similarity between Ps 79 and Ps 80: in fact Goulder calls Ps 80 "a natural successor to Ps 79."[37] Ps 79 ends thus

> So we your people and the sheep of your pasture will give you thanks for ever (79:13).

and it is immediately followed by

> "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel" (Ps 80:2).

Other similarities are:

Ps 79	Ps 80
v. 5 How long, O Lord? Will you be angry for ever?	v.5 How long will you fume as your people pray?
v. 4, 12 Taunt of enemies, derision and scorn of neighbors	v. 7 Derision of neighbors; sport of the foes
v. 2 Israel is God's inheritance	v. 2 Israel is God's flock
v. 13 We will thank you for ever.	v. 19 We will call upon your name.

Another psalm with equally striking similarity is Ps 44:

	Ps 44	Ps 80
Dispossession of the nations	v. 2	v. 8
Planting of Israel	v. 2	v. 8
Taunt of neighbors	vv. 13, 15	v. 6
God saves with the light of his face	v. 3	vv. 4, 8, 20
Appeal for help	v. 26	v. 19

3.2.5 Division of Psalm 80

Authors structure and divide the psalm according to their various viewpoints. Kissane, for example, divides it as follows:

Prayer for help	vv. 2–4
Israel's plight	vv. 5–8
Israel's past glories	vv. 9–12
The Ravaged Vineyard	vv. 13–16
Appeal for Judgment	vv. 17–20[38]

We, on the other hand, following the structure of Community Lament proposed by Westermann[39] divide it as follows:

Address	vv. 2–4
Lament	vv. 5–8
Vine	vv. 9–14

Petition	vv. 15–18
Vow of Praise	v. 19
Conclusion	v. 20

This done, we now proceed with the exegesis of the psalm.

Ps 80

1 For the director: According to the "Lilies."
A Testimony. Of Asaph. A Psalm.

2 O Shepherd of Israel, give ear:
lead Joseph like a flock.
O Enthroned on the Cherubs, arise.
3 before Ephraim,(Benjamin) and Manasseh.
Rouse your might
and come to save us.

4 O God, turn to us,
let your face shine
and we shall be saved.

II

5 O Yahweh, God of Hosts,
how long will you fume
while your people pray?

6 You have fed us with tears as our food
and given us tears to drink by the bowl.

7 You have made us the derision of our neighbors
and our enemies laugh us to scorn.

8 O God of Hosts, turn to us,
let your face shine on us
and we shall be saved.

III

9 A vine you brought out of Egypt
you drove out the nations and planted it.

10 You removed those who were before her,
you made her take roots
and made her fill the land.

11 The mountains were covered with its shade,
and the mighty cedars with its boughs.

12 You extended its branches to the Sea
and its shoots to the River.

IV

13 Then, why have you broken down its hedges
so that all who pass by pluck its fruit?

14 The boar of the forest ravages it,
what moves in the field feeds on it.

15 God of Hosts, turn, we pray,
look down from heaven and see:
(visit this vine).

16 Establish firm control over what your hand has planted
over the son you have strengthened for yourself.

17 Those who burnt it with blazing fire:
May they perish at your angry rebuke.

18 (May your hand be on the man of your right hand,
upon the son of man you raised up for yourself).

19 We will never turn away from you:
revive us and we shall call upon your name.

20 Yahweh, God of Hosts, turn to us
let your face shine upon us
and we shall be saved.

3.3 Exegesis

v.2 *O Shepherd of Israel, give ear.* Although the term "Shepherd of Israel" is hapax, Yahweh is often called "Shepherd" (Gen 49:24; Ps 28:9; Jer 31:10; Mic 7:14). In Ps 23:1, Yahweh is called "my Shepherd." The Patriarch Jacob says that God has been his Shepherd from birth (Gen 48:15). The Lord also made David his servant "shepherd" (Ps 78:70–72) and after him kings of Israel have been called "shepherds" (Jer 23:1–4; 49:19–20; Mic 5:4).

But most of these shepherds were negligent and fed themselves instead of feeding the flock (Ezk 34:1–10). In v. 11 of the same pericope, Yahweh undertakes to look after the flock himself. The culminating point is in v. 36 where Yahweh says: "I will be a true shepherd to them."

The prophet Jeremiah pronounces woe on the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep. Therefore Yahweh will raise a shepherd who will care for the sheep: the sheep will not fear him, and none will be lost (Jer 23:1–4). For this reason Yahweh will raise a messianic king who will rule wisely and execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely and his name will be : "Yahweh-our-Righteousness" (Jer 23:5–6).

A classic image of Yahweh as shepherd is found in Deutero-Isaiah. The prophet assures the timid Judeans returning to the land of Judah from the Babylonian exile that Yahweh will feed his flock like a shepherd, gathering the lambs in his arms, carrying them in his bosom, and gently leading those that are with young (Isa 40:11). This is one of the most beautiful passages and images of the Bible, true to Isaian tradition. So tender is God's love that he carries the lambs in his bosom as the owner nurtured his ewe-lamb in the parable of Nathan (2 Sam 12:3).

The image of a shepherd leaving the ninety-nine on the hillside in search of the single stray (Matt 18:13; Luke 15:40), which on finding he carries shoulder-high rejoicing and on coming home celebrates the recovery (Luke 15:5–6), gives insight into the shepherd/sheep relationship. He lays down even his life for his sheep. The climax is found in the saying of Jesus:

> I am *the good* (beautiful) *kalós* shepherd. . . .
> *The good* (beautiful) (*kalós*) shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.
> (Translation Mine: John 10:11)

The underlying metaphor provides a characteristic expression for the close God/

People relationship and emphasizes at the same time the Lordship of the guiding God over his people.[40] Also in this image, commitment and trust are exemplified.[41]

Right from ancient times people were aware how irresponsible sheep could be. "All we like sheep have gone astray" (Isa 53:6). As sheep could be naïve and sometimes stupid, to call Yahweh "the Shepherd of Israel" is an acknowledgement of the natural stupidity and obstinacy in waywardness of Israel.[42] But at the same time it attributes to the Shepherd the highest quality of patience, endurance and self-sacrifice.

The God who is addressed in this psalm is the Shepherd of *Israel*. Does Israel stand for the Northern Kingdom (Israel in the political sense) or for the entire people of God (Israel in the religious sense)? One could easily argue that it was to the Northern tribes that the reference was made especially as it was their territory that was threatened. Moreover it stands in parallelism with "Joseph." Anderson thinks that Israel could denote either the Northern Kingdom or the people of God in its totality.[43]

However it does appear that it is the entire covenanted people that is spoken about. It is the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob who is invoked. That "Israel" is parallel to "Joseph" is not overriding. It seems more in consonance with biblical tradition to think of God as the Shepherd of the entire people of God than of the schismatic tribes only. In Ps 81:6 we encounter a text where the entire covenanted people is called "Joseph."

> As a command he imposed it on Joseph
> when he went forth from the land of Egypt.

It is obvious that here the entire Jewish nation is called "Joseph." Rashi notes that Israel is parallel to Joseph and that it designates the entire covenanted people, but he adduces a special reason for it.

> All Israel are called by the name of Joseph because
> he provided for them during the famine.[44]

Although this may be true, his argument is not convincing.

The Shepherd of Israel is requested to listen to the prayer of his flock. Israel is the people of his pasture, the sheep led by his hand (Ps 95:7). Israel is repeating once again the prayers it had uttered so often in the past; a plea to God to show himself, to act and to save. Since no visible action on behalf of his people is evident, God addressed anthropomorphically is requested "to hear." To hear is "to take note, to listen, to intervene, to save."

If God to whom the prayer is addressed is indeed the "Shepherd of Israel," who has always shown such magnanimity in his dealings with his sheep, all the more reason why he could not abandon his flock at this crucial moment of its history. If Israel

was aware of being God's people, the flock of his pasture (Ps 79:13), it thereby confesses its utter inability for sustained moral rectitude and civic maturity.

God is called the "Shepherd of Israel" because the disaster which has befallen some of the tribes is felt to be a common affliction which sinks all the old differences into oblivion, uniting them under divine covenant. The tribes have a common responsibility which has its roots in the divine acts of guidance in Israel's history and in their various traditions.[45]

Lead Joseph like a flock. The MT reads נֹהֵג *noheg* which is kal ptc sing. But with Dahood, we read נְהַג *nehag:* which is kal imptv sg, because for stylistic reasons and for variation, biblical poets occasionally employed the ptc as a substitute for the imptv.[46] Examples are found in Pss 9:14; 17:14.

It is Yahweh, the Shepherd of Israel, who is called upon to listen to the prayers of the people. The result is that he will guide Joseph like a flock despite the naivete and occasional obstinacy of Joseph. God has always led and guided his people. We have a text which embodies all these ideas:

> With your steadfast love *lead* this people
> whom you have redeemed;
> in your strength *guide* them
> to your holy dwelling place (Exod 15:13).

O Enthroned on the Cherubs, arise. In the Psalter, Yahweh is said to be mounted on a cherub (Ps 18:11) or enthroned on the cherubs (Ps 99:1; Isa 37:16). The term, "cherub," needs some explanation.

The etymology is uncertain. It is found in the Akkadian as *karābu* to mean "prayer, blessing" or "to bless, to pray, to consecrate."[47] D. N. Freedman and M.P. O'Connor note that the root *krb* not attested in Biblical Hebrew whereas the root *brk* "to bless" is attested in the North West Semitic.[48] Some tried to derive *krb* from *rkb* "to ride" because God mounts the cherub and rides on the wings of the wind (Ps 18:11; 2 Sam 22:11; Ps 104:3) but such methathesis can hardly be proved or justified.

However the root *krb* is attested in the Ugaritic in 1 Aqht:2; nt:1:12 but the etymology and meaning are uncertain. Consequently probable meanings have been proffered: "to consecrate, bring an offering, a place of worship, an amulet, to pray."[49]

The cherubs appear in Babylonian and Canaanite mythologies either as mounts for the deity or in association with sacred vegetation. They are rarely found as human beings. Apart from later usage, they appear only in primeval history or in technical descriptions of God's throne and these are found in P (Exod 25–31) or in Ezekiel (9:3–11:22; 28:14–16; 41:18–25).

As living beings they appear twice in the context of vegetation and each time associated with the garden of God (Gen 3:24; Ezk 28:14). God expelled Man from the

garden and in front of the garden he posted cherubs *and* a flashing sword to guard the way to the tree of life. It will be necessary to study the text closely and not read meanings into the text. Faithful to the text we note that the cherubs do not guard the tree of life nor the gates of the garden: they do not appear in pairs nor are they only two in number. They neither hold nor wield a sword nor do they drive the Man and his wife out of the garden.[50] Unlike the serpent, they do not act independent of God nor oppose his will.

The cherubs bear the god in flight in vehicles drawn by one or other winged creatures. Yahweh is said to ride on a cherub or fly on the wings of the wind

(2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:11) and cherubs draw his vehicle (Ezk 1, 9, 11). In describing the creatures that support the throne, Ezekiel mentions many details: four living creatures with human form (1:5); four faces, four wings (1:6); straight legs (1:7); human hands (1:8); appearances resembling glowing coals (1:13); lightning movements (1:13, 14).

These beings are dependent on Babylonian and Canaanite mythologies. These features exemplify wisdom, strength and mobility which are the basis of God's actions in the universe. Cherubs are not "angels" nor should be considered "a choir of angels." Rather they are concomitant elements of theophany. The cherub is associated with the throne. Yahweh rides through the heavens (Deut 33:26); on the clouds (Ps 68:5); in the heavens, the ancient heavens (Ps 68:33); and comes to Egypt riding on a swift cloud (Isa 19:1).

In the Ugaritic, Aliyan Baal is called "rider of clouds," *rkb'rpt*.[51] He is the god of thunderstorm and that is his image as he rides into battle. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is said to ride on the cherubs and his full name is "Yahweh Sebaoth enthroned on the cherubs" (1 Sam 4:4). That is Yahweh in the splendor of his theophany!!!

In Ps 80, the image is that of a holy war. Before the harrassed and even subjugated tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh, Yahweh is called upon to appear in his strength and splendor, in his heroic power that brings help and creates salvation.[52]

This divine epithet, "enthroned on the cherubs" is often a designation for Yahweh in time of war, because he is expected to lead his people to war and grant them victory. Hezekiah, when threatened by the Assyrians with utter destruction appeals desperately to "Yahweh, the God of Israel, enthroned on the cherubs" (Isa 37:16). Consequently it is an appropriate appellation of Yahweh in time of dire distress.

הוֹפִיעָה *hophîʿa*—It is the Hiphil of **יפע** *yapha'* "to shine." The verb means "to send out beams, to cause to shine."[53] This is the more common understanding of the verb. God is called upon to shine forth brilliantly as in theophany. He seems to be hiding his face thereby causing Israel untold misery. His shining forth brings salvation.

That divine art of "shining forth" brings blessing and salvation is confirmed in the Blessing of Aaron:

May Yahweh bless you and keep
May Yahweh make his face *shine* upon you and be gracious to you
May Yahweh lift his countenance upon you and give you peace.
(Num 6:24–26)
(Translation: mine)

To let Yahweh's face shine is a sign of his favor and benevolence. Hence he shines in perfect beauty out of Zion (Ps 50:21) and shines forth as an avenging God (Ps. 94: 1). The same ideas are found in Ps 4:7; 31:17; 44:4; 119:135. In Ugaritic text, 1015: 9–10 we read

wpn špš nr by mid
"And the face of the suzerain shine greatly on me."

But yp' in the Ugaritic has a variety of meanings including "to arise."[54] In text 151: 19 we read yp' b'al—"May Baal arise." mn(m) ib yp' l'b'l ('nt:111:34, iv:48) "What enemy arises against Baal?" ib yp' ('nt:iv:49) "No enemy arises."

Moriarty notes that it was T. H. Gaster who adverted that the basic meaning of *yp'* was "to ascend, to climb, to arise."[55] Moriarty believes that Ras Shamra documents preserve the original meaning of *yp'* as is evident in psalms 50:2; 80:2; 94:1.[56]

Besides, translating הוֹפִיע as "arise" fits the context better. God who appears not to "hear," not "to listen to" the prayers of his people is called upon to arise as if from slumber. The Enthroned on the cherubs will rise and preside over the work of conquest for the salvation of his people and of their land.[57] This is confirmed by Ps 68:1

Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered
let those who hate him flee before him.

The current inactivity of Yahweh in the affairs of Israel can be compared to a slumber. It is weighing the people down. In fact, it is a dreadful punishment. Hence Yahweh is beseeched to arise and free his people.

Before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh. Joseph and Benjamin are the two sons of Jacob by his beloved wife Rachel (Gen 30:24; 35:16–18). Manasseh and Ephraim are the sons of Joseph (Gen 41:50–52). Hence the tribe of Joseph was the principal tribe of the Northern Kingdom, with Manasseh in the Trans-Jordania and Ephraim in the Cis-Jordania. Ephraim grew so powerful and populous that sometimes the entire Northern Kingdom was simply called "Ephraim" (Isa 7:2–17; 9:9, 21; 11:13). With the schism, part of Benjamin remained with the North while another remained with the South(1 Kgs 12:21; 2 Chr 11:1–4).

Why was Benjamin mentioned in this psalm especially as Benjamin in territory and in number was so small? "There is Benjamin, the least of them in the lead" (Ps 68:28).

To answer that question we must first resolve the critical question: Is the appearance of Benjamin in the text authentic? Herkenne says it is the greatest difficulty in understanding the hymn.

> Die Hauptschwierigkeit für die Eklärung des Liedes in v. 3a "Erscheine vor Ephraim, Benjamin und Manasses." Dieser stichus mit 4 anstatt 3 Hebungen rythmisch abweicht, fällt die Nennung Benjamins zwischen den beiden, sonst stets zusammen gennanten Josephusstämme Ephraim und Manasses auf.[58]

If "Benjamin were omitted, the psalm would be addressing the northern tribes only, which would confirm that the crisis threatened first and foremost the northern tribes. Omitting Benjamin would also restore the meter. The critical apparatus of BH suggests the deletion of either Benjamin or Manasseh, but there is no support in any manuscript for the deletion.

It should also be noted that during the Israelite journey through the wilderness, the Rachel tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh journeyed close to the Ark on the west side (Num 2:18–22). In all probability they stuck together. In the Booklet of Consolations, Rachel mourned for her children, the northern tribes, carried off into captivity (Jer 31:15).

It is possible, nay most probable, that "Benjamin" was added later after the fall of Jerusalem, when the text was redacted to include the South represented by "Benjamin." Consequently the prayer was for Israel in the religious sense. The final redaction would have taken place in the exilic or post-exilic period.

That Yahweh should rouse from his "slumber" and do battle for his people is not new in biblical tradition. A parallel passage is found in the Psalter

> Rouse yourself: Why do you sleep, Yahweh?
> Awake! Do not cast us of for ever.
> Why do you hide your face?
> Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?
> (Ps 44:23–24)

Yahweh is asked to arise and work his saving deeds for his people as in the days of old.

O God, return to us. הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ *hašîbēnû* "to turn." It is the Hiphil of שׁוּב *sub*. Hirsch thinks that the verse has to do with return from exile

> The entire Psalm is dedicated to generations of Israel which, enmeshed in the sufferings of exile, called upon God to return to them.[59]

However the "turn" is not a "return" from the exile. The turn around is not in the people but in God. It is for this *metabasis* that Israel is praying. The people, for their part, promise their response—their *anabasis*.

v. 4 The affliction of the people is fundamentally a trial of faith. They suffer not only because of the foe attacks but primarily by being separated from God, by being subjected to his anger. Whether they had sinned or not is not the case in question. Rather it is the fury and the anger of God that shakes them to the bone marrow.

> הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ On this Weiser makes a very important comment. The term comprises simultaneously man's external metabasis and metanoia: restoration of external circumstances and the turning of man's soul to God. Both of these happenings represent the "renewal of the covenant," and both of them are possible only if God on his part . . . turns again to his people and brings about that encounter in the theophany from which all the divine blessings flow.[60]

The prayer of the psalm hopes to bring about that encounter between God and his people. God is requested to turn around, to return to his people, to let his face shine on them once more, and his people will have peace. It is the estrangement that resulted in God hiding his face from his people. It is the absence of God, the absence of the light of his face, that has brought the calamity. If Yahweh's face shines on his people, he blesses them with peace.

v. 4 *Refrain*. The refrain, one of the characteristics of this psalm, is found in vv. 4, 8 and 20. To avoid repetition, we study the three verses here.

A refrain is not peculiar to Ps 80: it is found also in Pss 46 (3x); Ps 67 (2x); Ps 59 (2x); Ps 107 (4x), though occasionally with minor variations. The refrain is the persistent prayer to God, an untiring reminder to God of his people's most pressing need, a prayer that is not prepared to accept "no" for an answer. This prayer does not care for stylistic variations; it is stubborn in its insistence often using identical words (Matt 26:44).

> The refrain uses various epithets in addressing God:
>
a)	Elohim	v.4
b)	Elohim Sebaoth	v. 8
c)	Yahweh, Elohim Sebaoth	v. 20

In the MT, v. 8 reads אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת *Elohim Sebāôth*. For quite some time these words—Elohim Sebaoth –created grammatical and syntactical problems for scholars. Normally one would expect אֱלֹהֵי סְבָאוֹת. *Elohe* being in the construct. To solve the problem, some scholars believe that *Elohim* was a mechanical substitution for YHWH.[61] Anderson thinks that originally the reading could have been "O God of

Hosts" as in vv. 7 and 14, while in v. 4 and 19 the reading was "O Lord, God of Hosts," which could have represented a mixed reading. Consequently he concludes

> It is likely that Elohim was substituted for Yahweh, but familiarity with the usual expression created the reading which is syntactically difficult.[62]

Reasoning along the same line Kraus says

> In the Elohistically revised part of the Psalter, we should here read יהוה instead of Elohim. In its refrain, Ps 80 shows traces of Elohistic tradition. אלהים is to be supplied in vv. 7, 19, and S.[63]

But the problem can easily be solved via the Ugaritic where the phenomenon "Enclitic Mem" is found,[64] which is also extant in Hebrew. Besides vv. 5 and 20, Enclitic Mem is found again in Ps 84:9.

The Enclitic Mem is often associated with the genitive. It was used at the end of a word and so was assumed to have been enclitic (to have leaned) on that word. In Hebrew, sometimes it has the emphatic force and sometimes serves as a morpheme for indetermination. It occurs with almost every part of speech—verbs, nouns, adverbs, etc. Most common are its use in the middle of the construct chain. Enclitic Mem is very common in poetry.[65] Consequently, the correct understanding of the text is "God of Hosts", treating the " Mem" in Elohim as enclitic. It does not affect the translation significantly.

It is possible that the variation in the three invocations of God's name was strictly intentional and suggested the rising tempo in the earnestness of the people's prayer—"O God," "O God of Hosts," "O Yahweh, God of Hosts." This is the opinion of S. Terrien[66] and is shared by Franz Delitzsch.[67]We share this opinion and some rabbinical commentators have more to say.

Hence Hirsch says:

> This is a three-fold cry of mounting intensity (vv. 4, 8, 20) calling upon God to return to Israel. These degrees of urgency are expressed in a corresponding increase in the designations employed for the Name of God: first אלקים then צבאוֹת and finally ד אלקים צבאוֹת.[68]

Then he continues:

> though the Jews were guilty of idolatry, they had repented and thus became one of God's *legions*, one of the many *groups and forces* which function to do his will.[69]

Hirsch also speaks about three separate exiles about which the Jews prayed—the exile of the Ten Tribes, the Babylonian exile and the Roman exile.[70] Feuer on the other hand says

> The exile of Ten Tribes is not commonly reckoned among the exiles because they are regarded as a rebellious offshoot, rather than an essential part of the nation.[71]

For Rashi the three exiles are the Babylonian Exile, the Greek subjugation and the Roman Exile.[72]

v.5 *Yahweh Sebaoth*. This divine name and title occurs 284x in the OT, out of which 251x in prophetic writings. It is not found in the Pentateuch and occurs for the first time in 1 Sam 1:3, 11, and frequently at the time of the Judges. The formulaic expression is "Yahweh who sits / is enthroned on the cherubs" (1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; Isa 37:16).

The title has its origin in Shiloh traditions and was used most regularly in the context of the ark and of war. Yahweh, the Savior of Israel, shows forth his power mainly in war: He leads his people to war and to victory. With the destruction of Shiloh, the tradition was brought to the temple in Jerusalem where Yahweh was worshipped not only as a warrior but also as King (Isa 6:5) and as the Holy One of Israel (Isa 12:6).

It is necessary to emphasize that the name "Yahweh Sebaoth" is found mainly in prophetic writings

Isaiah 1—39	56x
Jeremiah (MT)	82x (LXX 10x)
Isaiah 40—55	6x
Haggai	14x
Zechariah	53x
Malachy	24x

It is not found in Trito-Isaiah or Ezekiel and only 15x in the Psalter. Hence Mettinger says

> The prophets have one notable feature in common: they represent a tradition closely associated with the Jerusalem temple. Is the name Sebaoth in some way contingent on this temple tradition?[73]

Sebaoth can mean "armies" or "military forces" (Judg 4:2, 7), "compulsory service" (Isa 40:2; Job 7:1), "service of worship" (Num 4:3; 8:4) "heavenly bodies" (Deut 4:19; 2 Kgs 17:6). With such a variety and complexity of meanings, it becomes more

difficult to define "Sebaoth." Mettinger, because of the numerous associations of Sebaoth with Yahweh seated or enthroned on the cherubs concludes that the designation has its home in the temple in Jerusalem; to God invisibly enthroned on the cherubs in the Holy of Holies.

> If the Sebaoth name refers to God as the heavenly King, and the term *sābā* in the singular is a common term for the heavenly host surrounding the throne, then it would be reasonable to conclude that the Sebaoth name is to be interpreted on the basis of this use of the word *sābā* rather than on the basis of its application to Israel's mortal armies, or to the universe in general, or anything else. The Sebaoth name speaks of God as "YHWH of heavenly hosts."[74]

In studying the divine name and title, *Yahweh Sebaoth,* Feuer noted that the name comprised the tetragrammaton and Sebaoth. The name יהוה is composed of letters of הָיָה, then הֹוֶה and finally יִהְוֶה׃He was, He is, He will be—and this represents the eternal aspect as the God of the entire development of history, from its genesis to the most distant future. Hence Feuer translates Sebaoth as "God of the Legions" and says it refers to God's control over the forces of creation.[76]

But Mettinger's understanding of Sebaoth, original and beautiful though it may be, does not sufficiently take into consideration the etymology, its uses in and around the sanctuary of Shiloh and many references to "God of Hosts" in the context of war and victory. It is incontrovertible that the title was used of Yahweh as God of War especially in the time of the Judges. There is the unresolved problem whether the Ark was used as a palladium (1 Sam 4:3–11).

Sebaoth is very rich in meaning and the title *Elohe Sebaoth* was used for many centuries in Israel's history. Sebaoth refers therefore to all bodies, multitudes, masses in general, the content of all that exists in heaven on earth, and under the earth. It is in the light of this that the LXX translates the epithet as κύριος τῶν δυνά μεων *Kyrios ton dynameōn.* It is a witness to an ancient tradition which understands the name in terms of some power or forces. The earliest form יהוה אֱלֹהֵי הַצְּבָאוֹת *YHWH Elohe hass[e]baoth* (Amos 3:13; 6:14; Hos 12:6) is found 14x in the MT whereas the shorter form is *Yahweh Sebaoth.*

Understanding Sebaoth is not a matter of either/or; we are not in the realm of concepts which are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive. Rich in meaning, it was used for many centuries at various periods and circumstances of Israel's history. Fairness and objectivity compel us to admit development of such a household term.

However it is incontrovertible that the meaning has to do with force, energy and dynamism. Hence we prefer to understand the term as God who is energy Himself and the source of power in the Universe, in the tripartite division of the Universe.

How long will you fume while your people pray? עַד מָתַי *ad māthaŷ* is a cry and an earnest prayer as well. It is used when the suppliant seems to have come to the end of the road, a desperate plea to God to end the calamity. It occurs 43x in the MT and means "how long," "for how long," "when?"

The verb עָשַׁן *'aśēn* means "to smoke, to be wroth."[77] עשן בmeans "to smoke against, to fume against, to be wroth with". Briggs says that the hard breathing of passion resemble smoke going forth form the nostrils.[78] Hence reasoning along this line, one would translate the text as "How long will you fume against the prayers of your people?"

The LXX understands the psalm as God being angry with the prayers of his people hence he inquires

> κύριε ὁ θεὸς τῶν δυνάμεων
> Εως πότε οργίξῃ ἐπὶ τὴν προσευχὴν τοῦ δούλου σου.
> "Yahweh, God of Hosts,
> how long will you be angry over the prayer of your servant"

The LXX calls Israel "servant" not "people."

In the Aramaic עֲשִׁין *asên* means "to be angry, to be heavy." Applied to the text, it would mean that Yahweh was angry *with* the prayers offered to him. But a question immediately arises: How could God be angry *with* the prayers of his people?

There are texts which indicate that God did not take pleasure in his peoples' prayers and turned his face away from them (Isa 1:15); rejected their fasts and holocausts (Jer 14:11, 12; Isa 58:4). Israel's sins created a gulf between God and themselves and so God veiled his face from them (Isa 59:2). In Lamentations 3:4 we read

> You have wrapped yourself with a cloud
> so that no prayer can pass through.

However, there is great difference between God being angry *with* the prayers of his people and God turning his face away *from* their prayers. In order to resolve this apparent difficulty some scholars resorted to finding an alternate root for עשן.

According to G. R. Driver, the verb עשן when applied to anger, requires אף *aph* as its subject (Deut 29:19; Ps 74:1). In Aramaic the root which means, also "to be heavy, to be strong" metaphorically would mean "to be obdurate, to be hard-hearted." Hence according to Driver the text would be understood as "How long will thou be obdurate 'in the matter of' or against thy peoples' prayer."[79]

Delitzsch thinks that the transferring of smoking of God's nostrils (fuming; panting with wrath (Ps 74:1; Deut 19:9) to God himself is bold: however, it is in the spirit of the biblical view of God's wrath."[80]

אף denotes "nostril, nose, face, anger." חָרָה *ḥarâh* is "to burn, be kindled of anger." החרה אף *ḥarah aph* means that "anger was kindled" while חרה ב *ḥarâh b*^{e} means that "the anger was kindled against."

Guichou concludes by asking how long would the anger of God continue to resist the assault of their prayers. Moreover even the punishment was obviously so grave that the pagan nations were already scandalized.

> Jusque à quand la fureur de Yahweh va-t-elle resister à l'assault des supplications? Dailleurs le chatiment déjà administré—suffit amplement, puisque le peuple se rassassie exclusivament de larmes l'est-a-dire de souffrance, et que son humiliation scandalize les paiens eux-memes.[81]

However, the construction עָשַׁן ב: is not to be understood after חרה ב for the prayer of the people is not the object of wrath but only the means whereby wrath is laid aside?[82]

Consequently, ב should be translated as temporal "Why do you fume *while* your people pray?" God seems to fume while his people pray. The lack of response on the part of God is due to the absence of God, to his anger, to hiding his face. God's silence is a confirmation of God's anger which is very oppressive to those suffering. Hence we read in Isa 64:11

> Yahweh, can you go unmoved by all this,
> oppressing us beyond measure by your silence?
> (Translation: Mine)

v.6. BREAD OF TEARS. It is bread or food consisting of tears running down the cheeks of the suppliants and upon the lips of the fasting and praying people, thus becoming their food and drink. It is not bread eaten *with* tears but bread consisting *of* tears. This image is quite common in the Bible.

> "My tears have been my food night and day" (Ps 42:4). Isaiah speaks of "bread of adversity and water of affliction" (30:20).

וַתַּשְׁקֵמוֹ *watašqēmô* It comes from the root שקה *šqh* "to give to drink, to drink water." When followed by ב, it means "to give drink by means of something."[83]

Tears by the bowl. שָׁלִישׁ *šālîš* can mean "a third, three-stringed," "an adjutant or officer."[84] It is found in the Ugaritic as "t l t "a third, thrice or plow,"[85] or a "metal, probably bronze copper."[86] Some texts of the Scriptures confirm this understanding. "Who has measured the dust of the earth in a bowl?" (Isa 40:12) "The blood of the

grape you will drink by the bowl" (Deut 32:146). The LXX translates שליש by εν μετρω. *en metro* "in or by measure".

Rashi offers an allegorical interpretation which renders שָׁלִישׁ *šalîš* as a cognate of שְׁלִישׁ " a third" or שָׁלֹשׁ "three." "Three" describes the three exiles of the Jews—the Babylonian Exile, the Greek subjugation and the Roman Exile. According to Rashi, the first lasted seventy years, a third of the Egyptian bondage. The second, the Greek subjugation, came after the two preceding exiles. The third, the Roman Exile, was imposed by the Romans whom he calls the descendants of Esau.[87]

שליש, however, is an instrument for measuring one third of an indeterminate object.[88] Though the third part of an *ephah* is a puny measure for dust of the earth, it is a large measure for tears. The psalmist laments that the God of Israel has given his people tears for food and made them drink their tears by the bowls. A very cryptic description of their sad and tragic situation!!

The imagery of drinking tears in sorrow is found in ANE. In Ugaritic Text 49:1:10, we read: tšt hyn udm't = "She drank tears like wine". A bowl of tears is not easy to come by. Trouble and tears have become as much a part of the peoples' lives as food and drink for daily sustenance.[89]

v. 7 *Derision of Neighbors*. The MT says: You have made us מדון *madôn* to our neighbors. מדון means "strife, contention."[90] The text would then mean that Yahweh has made them an object of contention and strife to their neighbors, i.e. the neighbors want to parcel out their land. They loot their property and even fight over the loot. Briggs understands the text to mean that Israel's neighbors fight among themselves over the spoils taken from Israel whether land or other goods.[91] Delitzsch says

> The neighbors are the neighboring peoples to whom Israel has become מדון, an object of contention.[92]

Tate suggests that the text be understood that

> the enemies use the strife for themselves, for their own interest (not likely, "have strife among themselves")[93].

Syntactically מדון ל: *madon l*^{e} would be *ethical dative* or *dative of interest* which expresses advantage or disadvantage.[94] Waltke and O'Connor call it *lamedh of interest* or *(dis)advantage (dativus commodi et incommodi)*. [95]

BH on the other hand proposes an amendment: to read מָנוֹד *mānôd* "shaking, wagging, shaking of head in derision."[96] The text would then mean: "You have made us an object of head-shaking or wagging of head for our neighbors", i.e. you have made us an object of mockery among our neighbors. This would agree with Ps 44:14–15 where we read

You have made us the taunt of our neighbors,
The derision and scorn of those about us.
You have made us a byword among the nations
a laughing stock among the peoples.

This opinion is upheld by Gunkel who translates the word as "Schutteln des Kopfes"[97] e.g. "wagging of the head"

But Dahood does not follow the proposed emendation of BH. Instead he preferred to relate the word to the Ugaritic *dnt* which means "baseness, shame"[98] which is in parallelism with *btt* "shame" and *tdmm* "abuse." He thinks that the root is *dana'a* which means "to be vile, disgraceful" and would therefore yield the following meaning "You have made us a vile object, a disgraceful matter, an object of derision." He reinforces his position by comparison with a parallel passage in Ps 44:14 which reveals that *madon* and *herpah* "taunt" are synonymous.[99]

It does appear that the opinion of Dahood is more plausible. There is no need to resort to textual emendation suggested by BH which has no support from any manuscript. The text therefore means that the plight of oppressed makes them a laughing stock to their unsympathetic neighbors.

The neighbors laugh among themselves. The critical apparatus of BH with the LXX, S and luxta Hebraeos reads לנוּ *lānû* which means "laughs us to scorn" instead of the למוֹ *lamo* i.e. "laugh among themselves." The verb , לעַג *lā'g,* means to "mock, deride, jest."[100] There is no need to follow the proposed emendation as the text in itself makes perfect sense: in fact it gives clearer meaning than the proposed emendation and fits the context better. Israel's neighbors make her an object of derision, an object of drunkard's song. (Ps 69:13). Later Judah was to become a laughing stock of object of derision among the countries (Ezk 16:57). This is another instance of ethical dative.

v. 9 *The vine vv. 9–17.* We come now to the third and to a very important part of this psalm, which, because of the allegory of the vine, is the κεφαλάιον; the *kephalayon*, the central section and therefore most important section of our study of this psalm. We shall, however, not repeat what has been said earlier on the vine. Cheyne says that vv. 9–12 are a fine allegorical picture of Israel as a vine (comp. esp. Isa 3:14; 5:1–7; Hos 10:1; Gen 49:22).[101] This section gives an account of the *Heilsgeschichte* in the individual form of allegory in which imagery and interpretation intermingle. The vine typifies the Dionysian world of fecundity and growth.[102]

Like the flock, the vine and vineyard represent a basic and a familiar possession that was owned, cared for and prized as a primary good of life.

Chaque paysan Israelite cultivait une vigne
avec un soin jaloux et vigilant.[103]

The vine is the most precious of Israel's three royal plants (Cfr Judg 9:7–15) and so seems an apt emblem of God's people, which is the nation of nations.[104] As sheep demands more care than other domestic animals, so the vine needs more continous and careful attention than any other produce of the land.[105]

Consequently Israel is the vine. Here the union of privilege and responsibility finds very rich and sweet expression. Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The vine emblem is common on Jewish coins and was admirably expressed in the colossal golden vine which hung, for the reception of golden gifts, in the porch of Herod's temple and spreading its branches under the cornices.[106] There are also coins of vine branch with leaf and tendril and with the inscription חרדת ציון "the deliverance of Zion."[107]

The vine played an important role in life in Palestine and it is quite natural that it should be used in literature as a symbol of greatness, blessings, fruitfulness, joy and peace.

Hirsch believes that vv. 9–12 narrate the cry that comes from the third *Galuth*, an exile that began but without any definite date set for its end. He says

> Verse 9–12 give a description of what God has done for us, an allegorical account of the manner in which he has set us up as His own plant in the midst of mankind.[108]

This is clearly an allegorization of the psalm, applying it to a much later period and without due reference to its *Sitz im Leben*.

3.3.1 The Mid-Section

This mid- section begins by placing God's redemptive act at the Exodus firmly on the basis of all that is to follow. It places the dark catastrophe of the present in front of the bright background of the first fundamental salvific deeds of Yahweh. The imagery now changes: the image of the Shepherd of Israel is replaced by that of the vine grower.

The section on the vine, which is the mid- section, is a very important part of the psalm. It is neither an afterthought nor a diversion from the plea for mercy and restoration. It is the central section of the psalm, its κεφαλαιον *kephalaion*. What preceded the section is a preparation for what is to follow as it summarizes the teaching of the psalm and gives the reasons why God has to rouse himself and restore Israel. The Shepherd of Israel, because of Israel's history and his commitment to her, has to visit and protect the vine his right hand has planted, and so prove he is Yahweh the God of hosts enthroned on the cherubs.

v. 9 *A vine you brought out of Egypt*. That the emphasis is on the vine is indicated by its position in the text

"A vine you brought out of Egypt." It recalls Hosea 11:1

> When Israel was a child, I loved him
> and *out of Egypt,* I called my son.

It was the Exodus that forged the various tribes of Jacob into a nation. The basis was the promise made to Abraham (Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–20). This vine, this choice plant, was taken out of Egypt. The vine can easily be moved from one place to another and given good conditions, will bud and flourish.

In order to give Israel a home, Yahweh dispossessed the Canaanites. Giving Israel the land of the nations is the planting of Israel. Yahweh, by a positive act of his will, drove out the nations to indicate his displeasure in them (Deut 7:1–6; Exod 23:20–33). But he found pleasure in the children of Abraham: he loved them and chose them as his special possession (Deut 7:6–8).

The Lord therefore drove away the inhabitants of the land to make room for Israel. The word used , גרשׁ *gršˇ,* is a strong word. The nations so dispossessed are the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and the Jebusites (Deut 7:1), the seven nations regarded as the traditional enemies of Israel (Deut 20: 17–18; Exod 34:11).

The dispossession of the Canaanites is attested to in other biblical traditions. A good example is found in the Psalter

> You, with your own hand *drove* out the nations
> but you did *plant* them.
> You did afflict peoples
> but you set them free (Ps 44:3).

The same idea is found in Ps. 78. Yahweh is said to lead his people like a sheep (vv. 52–53b), driving out the nations in order to give them an inheritance and settling the tribes of Israel in it (v. 55).

Though vine grew in Egypt, the terrain was not ideal for viticulture. Palestine presented more favorable conditions. Analogically Israel lived in Egypt for 400 years (Gen 15:13; Acts 7:6) or 430 years (Exod 12:40, 41; Gal 3:17) but because of the Promise, Israel had to be transplanted to the Promised Land. This planting is divine activity and the verb is נטע *nt'*. The same verb is used of Baal's activity. In UT 76:II:24 we read

> nt'n bars iby "we have planted my foes in the earth."

The underlying idea is that Israel had become so great in Egypt (Exod 1:7; 22) that it had to be transplanted. We read in Midrash Rabba on Exodus Ch. 44

> Why is Israel compared to a vine? Because just as a vine, when its owners seek to improve it, is uprooted from its place and planted elsewhere, and then it flourishes, so when God intended to make Israel's fame known throughout the world, He plucked them out of Egypt . . . .[109]

Also in Rabba Leviticus Ch. 36 we read;

> Just as one does not plant a vine in a place, where there are great, rough stones, but thoroughly examines the ground and then plants it, so thou didst drive out peoples and didst plant it. . . .[110]

v. 10 *You removed those before her*. The Hebrew text reads פִּנִּיתָ לְפָנֶיהָ *pinnîthā l[e]paneha* which could be translated: "You cleared before it." Hence BH in its critical apparatus suggests that דֶּרֶךְ *derek* "a way or road" may have accidentally been dropped from the text. With *derek* inserted one could then translate; "You prepared the way (the ground) before her."

Dahood does not see the need to introduce דרך into the text. Instead, based on the Phoenician he translates "hlpnyhm" as "those who were before them" and quotes Eccl 4:16 and Job 21:18 to prove that the preposition, "hlpnyhm" was used as a substantive.[111] Gunkel notes that פִּנִּיתָ לְפָנֶיהָ is a word play "*Wortspiel*" and translated the verb as "ausräumen."[112] i.e. "to clean before".

There us no need to introduce דרך especially a it is not attested in any MSS. Hence we believe that the text should be translated as "You removed those who were before her," not "you cleared the ground" as in RSV and NIV.

As for the vine, many modern versions make גֶּפֶן the subject of the verb וְתַשְּׁרֵשׁ *tašreš* i.e. the vine took root. But the LXX and *luxta Hebraeos* make God the subject: i.e. it is God who made the vine take root, and fill the land. This reading seems preferable and more in consonance with the theology of the psalm which makes the uprooting, the planting and the nurturing of the vine exclusively divine activities. Hence instead of reading וַתְּמַלֵּא *wat[e]malle'* "and it filled the earth" with the MT; we should with the LXX, S and luxta Hebraeos read וַתְּמַלֵּא *watimmālē'* as piel and translate as: "you made her fill the land."

To give more weight to his arguments, Dahood quotes the Ugaritic Text of 1 Aqht:159–60 šršk barş al yp'—"May your roots not flourish in the earth." Then he concludes

> The psalmist depicts God as the immediate cause of the heathens' expulsion from Palestine, of Israel's implantation

therein, and of her subsequent expansion throughout the Holy Land."[113]

By planting Israel in the land of Promise, which is ultimate goal of the Exodus, Yahweh fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham to give his descendants the land of Canaan (Gen 12:7; 15:18–21). Planting is a decisive act: it is an act indicating permanence: it is the irrevocable will of God. God drove out (גרשׁ) *garas* the nations but planted (נטע) *nata'* Israel.

Because the planting and the taking of roots are direct actions of God, the consequence is the phenomenal growth and fruitfulness of the vine. Hence the psalmist says that the vine took deep roots in the earth and filled the land.

v. 11 *The growth of the vine*. The vine grew and flourished so that it covered the mountains with its shades (an obvious hyperbolism) and the mighty cedars, the "cedars of God" with its boughs. The branches are envisaged as climbing the top of the highest of cedars of Lebanon and covering its mountain ranges. The cedars were described as the *cedars of El*. Some commentators like Gunkel,[114] Kraus,[115] Briggs,[116] and Weiser,[117] translate it as "the cedars of God." However, D. Winston Thomas believes that divine names, El or Elohim, can be used as epithets with an intensifying or superlative force e.g. נְשִׂיא אֱלֹהִים *n^{e} si elohim* "a mighty prince" (Gen 23:6), הַרְרֵיאֵל *harre-el* "great mountains" (Ps 36:7) and so "cedars of God" would mean "the goodly cedars."[118] Dahood, in perfect agreement, cites an Amarna text and quotes *kasap ilanu* "the very finest silver" and a Ugaritic text *tlḫn il* "a splendid table."[119] Therefore, the correct translation should be "the great or mighty cedars" That the shades of the vine covered the mighty cedars of Lebanon portrays Israel's complete and undisturbed possession of the land.

The vine extended its branches as far as to the Mediterranean Sea and to the River Euphrates. We have here the description of the wonderful growth of the vine. The mountains are the desert hills of the South; the mighty cedars of Lebanon are to the North; the sea is the Mediterranean Sea to the West; while the River, the Euphrates, is to the East.[120] In Deut 11:24, the land of Promise is described as extending "from the wilderness to Lebanon, from the River to the Western Sea." On the day of his enthronment a prayer offered for the King was that he rule from Sea to Sea, from the River to the ends of the earth." (Ps 72:8) The Mediterranean Sea (The Sea) and the Euphrates (The River) were the ideal boundaries of the kingdom of David; his kingdom as its zenith (1 Kgs 4:24; Zech 9:10). For David defeated the Philistines, the Moabites, the Kindgom of Zobah on his way to the River and imposed tribute on the King of Hamath. He also subjugated the Ammonites, the Philistines and the Amalekites (2 Sam 8:1–14).

God made space for Israel; secured it and gave it the possibility of unimpeded expansion. He made sure that Israel took roots and spread through the land. Setting out roots and filling the land is an image that beautifully illustrates Israel's right of

ownership over the land. Israel was no longer an alien גֵּר *ger* (Exod 22:10; Deut 10:19) or a sojourn תּוֹשָׁב *tŏsaḇ* (Exod 12:45; Lev 22:10) but had taken full control of the encompassing territory. This recalls the oracle of Isaiah

> In the days to come Jacob shall take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the land with its fruits (27:6).

As in the Canticle of the Vine, the vine metaphor interprets the history of Israel. It covers its history from the Exodus through the conquest to the possession of the land right up to Davidic times. That was the Davidic empire at its zenith.

The metaphor serves as a recollection of the past which is the basis for this prayer. If Yahweh had such grandiose plans and expectations for Israel and even made them a reality, he certainly will continue to protect and prosper the vine for his own name's sake, not necessarily for the desserts of Israel. It would be very appropriate to quote at length what some Jewish sage, as narrated by Hirsch, says about Israel as a vine.

> Thou didst cause גפן, a tribe of men destined for a sublime purpose, to grow into a nation in Egypt. Then Thou didst pluck it up from there in order to transplant it to a more suitable soil. This transplanting was a matter of such importance to Thee at the time, that Thou didst drive away other nations from their dwelling places in order to implant this one 'vine' that is Israel. Thou didst clear away from before it all alien vegetation (verse 10) that might inhibit its growth, so that it might strike roots and fill up the soil assigned to it. And it flourished (verse 11) growing high above all other great nations and throwing them into the shade. And anyone looking at its sons and tribes, could readily see that they were indeed plants of God.[121]

He went on further to say

> Israel occupied a central position in the world's lanes of commerce through the boundaries to the west and the north (verse 12). It sent its harvest to the Mediterranean Sea, which links nations and continents, and it benefited from the products of the kingdoms on the Euphrates River.[122]

v. 13 *Abandonment by Yahweh*. The parable of the vine here introduces anguish and bewilderment of the people over the contrast and contradiction between what God began and what he is doing right now. The same vineyard which has been so care-

fully tendered by God is now abandoned by God Himself. God has withdrawn his presence, hence the ensuing catastrophe.

The psalmist acknowledges that the plight of Israel was not due to the numerical strength of the enemy, nor to his mighty arsenal not to superior military strategy, but only because God had turned his face away from Israel. The responsibility of their misfortune is entirely God's. Hence in this section of the lament, You (sg) referring to God, is the primary subject, just as in setting up Israel as a nation. You, God, are solely responsible. Hence we note

You brought a vine out of Egypt.
You drove out the nations.
You planted the vine.
You removed those before her.
You made her take roots.
You made her fill the earth.
You made her spread to the Sea and to the River.

But also towards the destruction of the vine, Yahweh did the following

You fume while your people pray to you.
You feed them with tears for food.
You give them their tears in bowls to drink.
You make them the derision of their neighbors.
You make their enemies laugh them to scorn.
You remove the hedges of your vineyard.
You make all passers-by pluck its fruit.
You cause the wild boar ravage it.
You make it possible for all creatures that live in the fields to feed on it.

With regard to the restoration, God is called upon to act once again. This time the appeal is made in the Imptv. sg.

Look down from heaven and see.
Visit this vine.
Establish firm control over what your hand has done.

Changing the mood of the verb he continues

May the oppressors perish at *your* angry rebuke.
Revive us and we shall call upon *your* name.

Israel has one and only one problem: T*he Divine Thou*.

v. 13 *Why have you broken down its fences?* The root גדר *gdr* means "to wall off, to wall up, to build a wall." The noun גֶּדֶר *geder,* גְּדֵרָת *g'dereth* (f) means "wall, an enclosing wall, a hedge."[123] The normal security enclosure for a vineyard is a hedge (Num 22:24; Isa 5:5) though on rare occasions the vineyard can be surrounded with a wall even after a hedge has been erected around it. Without this protection the vineyard is doomed to destruction. Now the hedges are not only left unkempt; God willingly and deliberately joins hands with the enemy to destroy the hedges and so bring destruction and desolation to the vineyard. The question is: WHY? לָמָּה. LAMMAH?

The psalmist asks the question using the polite למה lammah (etymologically ל "for" and מָה *mâh* "what") instead of the more emphatic מַדּוּעַ, *madûa* 72 times in MT (from the root ידע *yāda*^{e}) which means "on what account, wherefore, how come?" The psalmist is not entirely surprised at God's action hence למה׃ which is a complaint as much as a prayer. It is like the prayerful עַד־מָתַי *ad mathay* (Cfr Isa 6:11 or Ps 6:6) which occurs 43x in the MT and means "for how long?"

Rather the psalmist is genuinely concerned about God's anger. He is apprehensive that his continued anger might result in the rejection of Israel and in the repudiation of the covenant. That would spell doom—the end of the vineyard and the destruction of Israel. By pulling down the hedges, the oracle of Isaiah in the Canticle of the Vine, Isa 5:5, is fulfilled. In fact this psalm seems to be a partial fulfillment of the threat.

Moreover, the same punitive acts of breaking down the walls, despoiling Israel, making her the scorn of her neighbors and covering her with shame are also found in another tradition of the Psalter Ps 89:41–42. With the walls broken down and the hedges removed, human beings passing by gain free entry into the vineyard, while roaming animals move about unhindered.

Although the psalmist implies that the burning anger of Yahweh against vineyard is justified, surprisingly he does not admit any sin on the part of Israel. There are many instances in biblical tradition e.g. the Babylonian exile, when Israel was punished, but contumaciously refused to admit guilt. Rather she protested her innocence and laid the blame not only on others but even on God. The following texts in psalm 44 illustrate the point:

v. 17 All this has come upon us
yet we had not forgotten you
or been false to your covenant.

v. 18 Our hearts have not turned back
nor our steps departed from your way.

v. 20 If we had forgotten the name of our God
or spread out our hands to a strange God . . .

This psalm puts the burden of their suffering squarely on God
In Lamentations 5:7 we read:

> Our fathers sinned: they are no more
> and yet we bear the burden of their iniquity. (Translation:mine).

The famous texts of Jeremiah 31:29 and Ezekiel 18:2 are pertinent:

> The fathers have eaten sour grapes
> and the children's teeth are set on edge.

Here, however, guilt is implied and the justice of God is not questioned. Rather Israel pleads for mercy and asks for restoration. The congregation is aware that its suffering is caused by God turning away his face. God's promises are not questioned.

> The prayer concentrates with a single focus, one thing alone—"the divine Thou." It addresses the God, the actor of the congregation's experience of salvation and suffering and seeks God's resumption of his earlier work of restoration.[124]

The prayer is for God's turning back. Every Israelite is aware of the enormous distance between the heavens and the earth: but God dwells in the highest heavens. Nevertheless from the highest heavens he looks down with love and pity on the "children of men." Hence we read in Isaiah 63:15

> Look down from heaven and see
> from your holy and glorious habitation.
> Where are your zeal and might?
> The yearning of your heart and your compassion
> are withheld from me.

Despite their prayer the congregation is aware that the distance between God and his people has been widened. The distance confirms that the calamity they face can only end if God narrows the gap. Hence Mays says:

> The psalm is a witness that the congregation must in the long last and in its extremity look away from its repentance to a kind of repentance in God—in turning away from wrath and returning to grace. The trust that God will in the end do so is based on nothing in the congregation. It is

> based on the self-understanding that the congregation is the work of God . . . . Believing that, the congregation can hope that God will not abandon what he has begun.[125]

That explains why there is no confession of sin, no admittance of guilt, even though the congregation does not presume to declare itself innocent or imply that God was guilty.

By calling to mind the events of the Exodus, the psalm is not a recollection of "the good old days" so that the present affliction may become more impressive against that background: on the contrary it is the point where God and his people meet, an encounter which has come to pass not only in the bygone days but which takes place afresh during the representation of the *Heilsgeschichte* in cult. The past and the present are here inextricably woven because it is God's presence, then and now, which is at stake.[126] The calamity of the present contrasts with God's redemptive deeds of the past. Would God wish to destroy the works of salvation which he initiated, to which he is committed and which he can still bring to fulfillment?

Sin is not the issue, but God's anger: the anger that makes God turn away his face from his covenanted people even while they pray with copious tears. The problem now is: how does Israel link up with God again especially as the surest and the most incontrovertible means of getting his attention and favor has failed? Would his anger end in disowning Israel, destroying the people as he destroyed the seven nations of Canaan?

> They face the incomprehensible problem which calls into question the meaning of their piety, that the way in which they seek contact with God leads to their estrangement from him, that they have to realize that God, upon whom they call as their helper, is their adversary, and that they have to experience his anger at the very point where they expected comfort.[127]

Their exasperation is expressed in the complaint that their tears have now become their bread; the tears they shed so plentifully can now satisfy them as food. The land of promise is no longer a guarantee of divine blessings; they, the pride of the nations, have become an object of mockery among their neighbors.

In the face of these tough conditions and insoluble problems, the people of faith turn to God, undaunted in prayer. This is the paradox of Israel's faith. Israel in her trials does not lose faith in the face of incomprehensibility of God, for the hand that strikes is the hand that heals (Job 5:18). Their one and only prayer is: RETURN, LORD OF HOSTS.

The boar of the forest. The Hebrew text reads חֲזִיר מִיַּעַר *hazir miya'ar* meaning

"boar, swine" and also "wild boar."[128] יַעַר *ya'ar* means "forest, wood, thicket," hence the rendering "the boar of the forest" or "the swine of the thicket." מִיַּעַר is written with *suspended* ayin *ayin suspensum*. According to the Babylonian Talmud, the ע is suspended because it is the middle letter of the Psalter just as the ו of גַּחוֹן of Lev 11:42 is the middle letter of the entire Torah.

> The early (scholars) were called *soferim* because
> they used to count all the letters of the Torah. Thus,
> they said, the *waw* in *gahon* marks half the letters of
> Torah; *darosh darash,* half the words; we-hithggalah
> (half) the verses. The boar out of the wood,
> doth ravage it: the ayin of yaar marks half of the Psalms.
> (Kiddushin 30[a])[129]

The rabbis also taught that there were 5888 verses in the Torah; the psalms exceded this number by eight while the chronicles were less by eight.[130] These statements cannot easily be verified. However, it does appear that the suspended *ayin* is an indication to a marginal reading which with time found itself into the text.

The חזיר is an unclean animal (Lev 11:7; Deut 14:8; Isa 65:4; 66:17) and therefore a suitable symbol for Israel's enemy—strong, wild, destructive, unclean, to be dreaded and hated. Wild boars live by hundreds among the reeds of Lake Merom.[131] In the East, the wild boar is looked upon as the most destructive enemy of the vineyard. Strangely enough, damage done by the wild boar to the vineyard is not recorded anywhere else in biblical tradition though this phenomenon must have been familiar and regular in the Levant.

Delitzsch prefers to understand the term not necessarily as a wild boar but as "an untameable vigorous wild animal"[132] In the Ugaritic the word is "hzr," "swine,"[133] or "hnzr" with the same meaning.[134]

יְאֹר *y^{e}ōr* is "the Nile." The suspended *ayin* creates the possibility of a variant reading. If one reads מִיאֹר *miyyor* it would mean "the boar of the Nile" and therefore an explicit allusion to Egypt.

To understand the text as "the boar of the Nile" would make the subject specific. This is not impossible because the Bible has often used animals for countries. For example, Egypt is called "flies" (Isa 7:18) and "the Leviathan" (Isa 27:1), while the Pharaoh is "the Dragon" (Ezk 29:3; 32:2). The enemies of Israel have been called "the beasts that dwell among the reeds" (Ps 68:31). Animals or their symbols are used to punish Israel for its infidelity. Hence we read in Jer 5:6

> A lion from the forest shall slay them, a wolf from the
> desert shall destroy them. A leopard is watching against
> their cities, everyone who goes out of them shall be torn

> to pieces; because their transgressions are many, their apostasies are great.

Egypt has a long standing history of fomenting trouble and of creating crises in the Levant to gain political, territorial and economic advantages for itself at the expense of smaller nations. It has always wanted to be a force to reckon with in the Fertile Crescent with no scruples in using other nations as pawns. It preferred to use Israel and other nations to distract Assyria and Babylonia to consolidate her gains.

Egypt often encouraged vassal states to rebel against their overlords. During King Hezekiah's reign, even though Judah had sworn allegiance to Assyria, Egypt made a defense pact with Judah, a pact that Isaiah condemned in strongest terms (Isa 30:1–5; 33:1–3). Hence the Assyrian cup-bearer-in-chief described Egypt as "the broken reed of a staff, which pierces the hand that leans on it." (2 Kgs 18:21)

The Pharaoh, Hophra (589–570) encouraged King Zedekiah of Judah to rebel against the Babylonians, and even made a show of support and solidarity during the siege of Jerusalem. But Egypt backed off as soon as the Babylonians advanced towards them (Jer 37:5, 11). The end result was the total destruction of the city, the razing to the ground of the city walls, the torching of the temple and of the city, the untold suffering and humiliation of the Judeans (2 Kgs 25; Jer 22), thanks, in great measure, to the "support" of Egypt.

Kraus[135] following Martin Noth[136] thinks that "the boar of the Nile" refers to Neco's incursion into Judah in the reign of Josiah. This we shall discuss later. Buttenweiser on the other hand believes that by the "wild boar" the Edomites were meant.[137] He supported his argument from the Ethiopian Book of Henoch 89:12 which speaks of a "black wild boar" (89:42–43). No. 89:66 is very explicit.

> So the lions and the leopards ate and devoured the majority of those sheep: the wild boars also ate along with them. Then they burnt that tower and plowed that house.[138]

Buttenweiser thinks that while "the wild boar" was Edom, Assyria and Babylonia were called "the lions" and "the tigers" respectively. Consuming the largest part of the sheep was done by the Assyrians and the Babylonians, while Edom assisted the Babylonians to overthrow Judah and burn the temple.[139] The role played by Edom is well documented in Israel's history.

> Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
> the day of Jerusalem
> how they said: "Raze it, raze it
> down to its foundations" (Ps 137:7)

This tragic memory lingered in Israel's history as is evident in Ezekiel Ch. 35 especially vv. 5, 10; and also in Ch. 36, 2–3, 5. There it was recalled that after the fall of Jerusalem, the Edomites pushed northward and annexed the southern end of Judah. The Jewish sages see the swine as a symbol of deception and hypocrisy. The swine is an unclean animal because, though it has cloven hoof, it is not a ruminant (Lev 11: 7). They also identified the swine with Esau and the Roman Empire. Because the swine has only split hoof Rashi says

> When the swine is lying down, it puts out its hoofs as if to say "I am clean:" so does this wicked state (Rome) rob and oppress, yet pretend to be executing justice (Rabba Genesis II 65:1)[140]

Rashi in his commentary on the Psalm 80 says

> Moreover it (the pig) has some of the identifying marks of purity just as Esau has the merit of the patriarchs.[141]

Briggs thinks that the Syrian neighbors could be considered "the boars of the forest" and the Philistines the "beasts of the fields."[142] It does appear, however, that the identity of the nations in question cannot be proved with any measure of probability. The reading, "the boar of the Nile," is disputed and identifying the nations will depend to a large extent on the date of the psalm—an issue which has been discussed extensively.

The psalm is talking about enemies in general. The hostile acts consist in taking advantage of the broken hedges to move in, pillage, loot and devastate the vineyard. The enemies move in at will, destroy and devour Israel's heritage. Metaphorically they pull down the vine, devour its fruit, turning the vineyard into an uninhabitable place and eating up the tender leaves. The picture of Isaiah 7:23–25 comes alive again.

זִיז שָׂדֶה. *ziz śadēh* זִיז is collective singular—and it means "moving things." Here we are dealing with "the moving things of the field." This would include all enemies of the vineyard especially predators and the wild boar. All these negative forces collaborate to bring total destruction to the vineyard. This is highlighted by verb יְרַעֲנָּה *yir'ennâh* "devour", which in the piel found here, onomatopaeically describes how some of the animal kingdom devour the vine.

יְכַרְסְמֶנָּה *y^{e}karsmennâh* It can be derived from the root כסם *kasas* "to shear, to clip."[143] It is hapax. In the Akkadian it appears as *Kasāmu* "to cut to pieces," "zerschneiden."[144]

Though it appears in our text as quadriliteral *krsm*, the basic root is *ksm*, with *r* as a secondary addition to the root. Because of the difficulty the text presents BH proposes

יֶהֱרְסֶנָּה from the root הרס *haras* "to throw down, break up, tear down."[145] The meaning then would be: because the hedges are pulled down, wild animals move in freely, ravage and destroy the vine. Hirsch in his commentary says:

> Why, then, hast Thou Thyself broken down all its defenses
> now and delivered it up to destruction without means of
> protection so that, at present, whoever passes along the way,
> whatever power, great or small, that they may come upon the
> proscenium of history—transient or lasting, may affect its fate."[146]

Israel has had to suffer at the hands of every invading force. Every passer-by feels welcome to pluck its fruit and so Israel had to suffer at the hands of all great empires of history.

אָרָהּ *ārâh* is the verb "to pluck" and one can see some similarity with the verb ערה"'*rah*" "to be naked"—hence to render bare, to denude."[147]

3.3.2 Prayer for Restoration

This final section is an earnest prayer for the vine. It begins with the refrain in its variant form. It is a passionate plea to Yahweh by his title of war "God of Hosts" to turn around again. Being God, he has absolute power and his people can with trust and confidence look back on the great foundational deeds of Israel as a nation—deeds which created and saved Israel and so became paradigms for future salvific deeds.

The people suffer not only because of the relentless attacks of the implacable foe but primarily from being separated from God and subjected to his rage.

> Dieu semble se desinteresser de la vigne qu'il a tant
> choyeé. Mais d'un seul regard menacant, it peut
> ruiner tous les ennemis.[148]

The complaint becomes more concrete as it sets the past and the present over against one another. Dante says

> Nessun maggior dolore
> che ricordarsi del tempo felice
> nella miseria
>
> There is no greater grief than to remember days of joy
> when misery is at hand.

The turn around, the conversion is on the part of God. שׁוּב *šuḇ* "turn" is the end of calamity and the beginning of a new era in God's relationship with his people.

The psalmist is confident that this prayer will be heard which is the reason why Israel is crying to her God. God could not and would not abandon the vine; the work on which he expended so much. Israel's history is the basis, the hope and the assurance for this prayer. The often repeated refrain is to Yahweh Sebaoth to act as he was wont. Israel is throwing herself into the arms of her Saving God מוֹשׁע אֵת־יִשׂרָאֵל *môšia' eth yisrael* "the Savior of Israel" (1 Sam 14:39) for salvation and restoration.

It is precisely because it is God not man who has proved to be Israel's enemy: God who made the covenant with Israel has appeared to have forgotten it. It is precisely because their fate is solely in God's hands—the God of the Exodus, the God who led them across the Sea of Reeds, through the desert and planted them in the Promised Land; the God of the Exodus and of the Conquest—it is to this God that Israel is offering her prayers. God has chastised, *therefore* he will heal.

But restoration is possible only with the renewal of the covenant and this can take place only if God turns again to his people and lets his face shine on them, thereby bringing about an encounter in a theophany from which all blessings flow. This is the focal point of the psalm: once achieved, Israel is restored and healed. Having reached this point, they experienced their separation from God so intensely that the best they could do is to offer him the short and powerful prayer—TO TURN AGAIN.

שׁוּב־נָא *šub nā* " turn, please". It has the same meaning and force as הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ, from the same root, שׁוּב "to turn".

Look down from heaven. The sentence indicates once again that there is separation between God and his people, which is emphasized by the verb, "look down," this time with pity.

Visit this vine. A visit is an action which can be for a gracious purpose or for punishment. A human can visit another for a good purpose (Gen 34:1; Judg 15:1; 2 Chr 18:2) and human beings can visit God i.e. "seek his face" (Isa 26:16). More often it is God who visits his people (Exod 3:16; Job 7:18; Luke 7:11). God visits his people as a Savior (Ps 106:4) and the Rising Sun comes from on high to visit his people (Luke 1:78). Visit is divine presence, a dispensation of salvation and restoration Hence God visits the earth (Ps 65:10).

> Visit can also be God's response in the form of punishment (Job 35:15; Ps 59:6; Isa 10:3; Jer 8:12).

The text has some critical problems. BH suggests that "visit this vine" be deleted on account of the meter. The reading makes perfect sense without it. Very probably it was an early marginal reading, added to keep alive the imagery of the vine, which

was later introduced into the text. The gloss had the advantage of effecting on easy transition from the metaphor of the vine to the concluding section of the psalm. *Visit this vine* is certainly a gloss and it is indicated in the translation.

v. 16 *Establish firm control over what your right hand has planted.* The key word to understanding the text is כַּנָּה *kannah*, a hapax, and it presents a lot of problems. Dahood calls it a stubborn puzzle,[149] while Gunkel, who says it is *vielgedeutet*, i.e. subject to a variety of interpretation continues

> כַּנָּה kann hier nicht fem zu כֵּן "stelle gestelt" sein; die Bedeutung "wurzel, Zweig" Hier, T ist im Hebräischen sonst nicht belegt.[150]

Kraus prefers the reading גָּנָה *gānâh* (enclosure, garden).[151] The LXX translating it as κατάρτισαι *katartisai*—imptv first aor. middle—understands it as "restore", from the root כּוּן *kun* while S, T and luxta Hebraeos prefers to explain it as a noun, כַּנָּה *kanâh* "stem, root." BDB explains the word כנה as "root, stock."[152]

The text is difficult and no one solution commands the support of exegetes. Hence following the guidelines of Dahood[153] we translate:

> Establish firm control over what your right hand has planted
> over the son of man you have strengthened for yourself.

The Right Hand: It signifies "strength, power, privileged position." The King sits at the right hand of God (Ps 110:1) and God sustains the just with his right hand (Ps 18:6). God's right hand and holy arm works wonders (Ps 98:1). He established Israel with his mighty hand and outstretched arm (Deut 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29).

Yahweh takes care of the king; gives him the wisdom to rule (Ps 72:2) adopts him as his son (Ps 110:4), thereby becoming his Father (Ps 89:26) and leads him to war (Ps 20:9). Though the enemy may burn and devastate the land (Ps 89:38–45) because God is angry with his people (Pss 89:46; 13:1; 74:9; 79:5), God's rage will turn them into a blazing furnace, his anger will engulf them and his fire will devour them (Ps 21:8–10). Hence the psalmist prays

> The right hand of Yahweh does valiantly
> the right hand of Yahweh is exalted
> the right hand of Yahweh does valiantly!
>
> I shall not die, I shall live
> and recount the deeds of Yahweh (Ps 118:15b-18).

v. 17 *Those who burnt it with blazing fire.* The MT reads שְׂרֻפָה *śᵉruphâh* i.e. "one

being burnt," but this does not make much sense in the context. While keeping the consonants we punctuate it with BH as שְׂרֻפֶהָ, *"s^{e}raphuha*" "those who burnt her."

The next difficult term is כְּסוּחָה *k^{e}suḥâh* "one being cut down." With Dahood we derive the root not from כסח "to cut off, cut away"[154] but from סָחָה *sāḥah* "to scrape, scrape away, to clear."[155] The letter כ is emphatic, modifying סחה. It is the piel and here it means "to scrape, clean, to scour."

Both BDB[156] and Dahood[157] see a close relationship between this verse and Ezekiel 26:4. Speaking about Tyre, the text says

> I will scrape (סְחִיתִי) its soil from it
> and make it a bare rock.

The text is to be understood as follows: Those who have burnt the vine with blazing fire; may they themselves perish at the blazing of God's anger.

v. 18 *May your hand be upon the man of your right hand.* היה יד יהוה על "The hand of YHWH came down upon . . . ." is the expression commonly used for the Spirit of God that descends on a charismatic. It is found particularly in Eziekiel (1:3; 37:1; 40:1). It means that power and strength from God descends on the individual to perform heroic deeds in God's name.

The prayer is for the man of God's right hand, the son of man he has raised up for himself. Does this perchance refer to Benjamin (son of the right hand) of v. 3, or to the king seated at the right hand of God's throne? The context does not indicate that it is the tribe of Benjamin that is in discussion.

"Son of man" means man as weak, ignorant, subject to sin, illness, death and corruption in the grave. "Son of Man" is also a messianic title (Dan 7:13). Could the epithet refer to the "Royal Messiah", Apocalyptic Figure, or to the King Yahweh has appointed for himself?

It is certain that the Royal Messiah is not the figure in question. The text most probably refers to the king on the throne whose kingdom is seriously threatened by external aggression. Because of his weakness and utter helplessness, he is in word and deed, "son of man."

But more importantly this verse seems to be a gloss. It is an ancient editorial elaboration of v. 16 which does not introduce any new idea or develop any existing one. The following concepts in v. 16 are repeated in v. 18.

> v. 16 "right hand," "establish control," "son," "strengthen for yourself."
> v. 18 "right hand," "hand be upon," "son of man," "raised up for yourself."

Briggs dates this editorial expansion to the Maccabean period.[158]

v. 19 *We will never turn away from you.* The ו in ולא "*wᵉlō*" is emphatic indcating Israel's resolve never to turn away from her God.

נָסוֹג *nāsôg.* The verb is ordinarily translated as "to move away," to backslide." It has also a secondary meaning of "to fence about."[159] Tate interprets the text as "we will never be backsliders again" (cfr Ps 53:4; Prov 14:14; Ps 44:19; Isa 50:5; Ps 78:57; Zeph 1:6).[160] Dahood prefers to translate as "we *have* never turned back on you" thereby translating the imperfect as completed action.[161] This is grammatically and syntactically possible especially as Israel can claim that as a nation, she has never apostasized from Yahweh, and never repudiated Yahwism. This conviction is strongly reaffirmed in Ps 48:18–23. Israel has not always readily admitted its sinfulness.

However the future tense seems to fit the context better. Since Israel is pleading for restoration and even though in this hymn, the sin of Israel has never been the issue, the promise of fidelity will go a long way to temper the anger of God. For the last time, Israel makes a giant leap of faith into the arms of God, her cause and the author of her salvation, confident she will be heard. The light of Yahweh's face will shine upon her and she will be safe.

Israel in gratitude will hold firm to her faith and so witness to humanity God's love and fidelity. She shall no more lapse into idolatry or rebellious conduct (Josh 24:16–25). Israel prays for her revival, a prayer she makes with unwavering faith.

I cannot think of a better conclusion to our study of Psalm 80 than a quotation from the commentary of Hirsch on Ps 80.

> The vine can be the noblest of all plants if it brings forth the fruit expected of it: without its fruit, however, it would be quite worthless, for its wood alone has no use whatsoever. So, too, Israel is the noblest and most blessed among the nations, provided it fulfills its purpose. However, if Israel should be unfaithful to its calling, it will sink far below all other nations and will be of no use or value whatsoever.[162]

Israel is the vine taken by Yahweh from Egypt and planted in the land of Israel. Yahweh does not regret his gifts. Yahweh will return and restore Israel.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Matt 21:33–44)

The *Sitz im Leben* of the parable of the wicked husbandmen is the authority of Jesus that was challenged by the Jewish leaders (Matt 21). Following the Matthean tradition of placing the expulsion of the dealers from the temple towards the end of the public life of Jesus (Matt 21:12–17), unlike John who placed it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry (2:13–22); and since the purification of the temple was the duty of the Messiah (Mal 3:1–4); by that very act, Jesus claimed for himself both the title and the office of the Messiah. This the Jewish leaders resented and therefore asked him: "By what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?" (Matt 21:23). It was in response to this question that Jesus told them three parables:

- the parable of the two sons (Matt 21:28–32),
- the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Matt 21:33–44) and
- the parable of the Wedding Feast (Matt 22:1–14).

All these parables teach the same lessons:

- The call of the Jewish people
- Their inability—especially of their leaders—to respond to the call to obedience and piety
- The call of the "others."

This explains why Matthew in his arrangement begins the parable of the wicked husbandmen with "Hear *another* parable (v. 33) and in Chapter 22 we read: "And *again* Jesus spoke to them in parables."

But that is not all. Even though these three parables are distinct, placing them one after the other, and assigning them chronologically to the end of Jesus' earthly ministry; the hagiographer wanted to make a special impact on his audience. While each parable makes full meaning if interpreted in isolation, their full gospel meaning is attained when interpreted in relation to the other.

While Jewish leaders question the authority of Jesus, he, by these parables wanted to instruct them on the correct understanding of election, the obligations flowing from it and the need to live up *immediately* to the demands of the kingdom values. It is also a timely warning to the leaders on the need for repentance, to repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15), otherwise the kingdom would be taken from them and given to a nation, a people, that would produce its fruit (Matt 21:43).

Hence the failure and the rejection of official Judaism, which runs through these parables, is a theme which occurs frequently in Matthean tradition: (3:7–10; 8:11–12; 12:38–42; 13:10–17; 15:1–9; 16:5–12), achieving its most explicit expression in 21:43.

As tension between Jesus and official Judaism represented by their leaders continues to mount, Jesus began to teach that authentic Israel was to be found in him and in his mission, no longer in official Judaism. This was enacted in Chapter 21 by the cleansing of the temple (vv. 12–17) and in the symbolic destruction of the fig tree (vv. 18–22). It will appear with greater emphasis in the denunciations of Chapter 23 and culminate in Chapter 24 with the prediction of the destruction of the temple.

> It is in this sustained build-up that these three parables occupy an important place.[1]

Augustine Stock says that these three parables bespeak judgment on Israel because of her repudiation of John the Baptist (21:28–32); of Jesus himself (21:3–46), and of his messengers (22:1–10). Of particular importance to the plot in Matthew's story is the second of these parables, that of the wicked husbandmen (21:33–46).[2]

The parables of the Two Sons and of the Wicked Husbandmen have much in common both in content and vocabulary. Both contrast the failure of the Jewish leaders to recognize the prophetic authority of John the Baptist and the ministry of Jesus and both conclude with the astonishing gift of the kingdom to those who never expected to share in it.[3] Both have four items of vocabulary, ὕστερον *hósteron* "finally", ὡσαυτῶς *hosautōs* "similarly", ἀμπελών *ampelōn,* "vineyard" and βασιλεία του θεοῦ *Basileia tōu Theou* "kingdom of God". But the distinctive element in the parable of the tenants in Matthew but not in the parable of the two sons is the note of judgment (21:44).

This parable may have a wider context. Eduard Schweizer finds in this wider context a fourfold pattern to which Matt 21–25 corresponds: it is a pattern of trial,

declaration of guilt, pronouncement of sentence and punishment. He goes on to say that the planned attack on Jesus is transformed suddenly into a trial in which the leaders are examined. The first parable is the verdict: what the tax collectors and prostitutes have understood, the leaders of Israel have not recognized (21:32). The second parable—the Wicked Husbandmen—brings the *sentence:* the taking away of the kingdom from the Jews and giving it to a nation (21:43). In the third parable, the wedding feast—the *execution* of the sentence: the destruction of the murderers and the burning of their city (22:7). But the climax is yet to come. It is found in 22: 11–14 and is a warning to the community that they face the threat of this same judgment if they behave as Israel did.[4]

4.1 A Parable or an Allegory?

The pericope of the Wicked Husbandmen is often referred to as a "parable." Even the biblical text itself calls it a parable; indeed another parable: ἄλλην παραβολὴν ἀκούσατε *allen parabolén akousate* (Matt 21:33). Some however believe it is an allegory. J. Jeremias says: "The whole parable is evidently an allegory."[5] But since its genre will impact its exegesis, it becomes necessary to speak briefly on "parable" and "allegory."

In the Greek New Testament, two words are used for this figure of speech: παραβολή "parabole" and παροιμία ˓paroimia". Παραβολή occurs 50 times with the following meanings: "parable" sg. 30 times, pl. 15 times; "lesson" two times; "speaking figuratively" (hapax); "illustration" (hapax) "proverb"(hapax). Παροιμία□"parable, simile" is found five times. Both translate the Hebrew מָשָׁל "māshāl" (40 times), to mean "oracle, proverb, byword, discourse, parable, ridicule, taunt; or מָשַׁל (17 times)—"to be like, to quote proverbs, to mock, to compare."

מָשַׁל has these shades of meaning:

in Kal:	to make or repeat a proverb (Ezek 17:2)
in Niphal:	to be or become like (Isa 14:10)
in Piel:	to tell a riddle, speak in proverbs (Ezek 20:49)
in Hiphil:	to compare with (Isa 45:6)
in Hithpael:	to become like (Job 30:19)[6]

In classical Greek, παραβολή has the basic meaning of "to set beside, to compare," from the verb παραβαλλειν *paraballein* and the noun παραβολή which means "similitude, parable." In the New Testament παραβολή΄ translates מָשָׁל with the basic meaning—"to be like, similar," except two instances Qoh 1:17; Sir 47:17.[7]

The synonym, παροιμια, expresses an essential aspect of a proverb. It is not used independently but is a sentence accompanying παρα, *para* amplifying or summing

up what has been said. It states an experienced truth of popular wisdom in short and pointed form.[8]

A parable therefore is an extended metaphor, frequently becoming a brief narrative, for didactic purposes. An allegory on the other hand is an extension of a simile, often in a narrative form but since each term or concept has its peculiar meaning, one ignores the literal meaning to discover new and hidden meanings in each term used.

A parable presents one single point of comparison and the details are not intended to have independent significances, while with the allegory, each detail is a metaphor and each detail has a meaning on its own right.

> A further point of contrast between the parable and the allegory is that while the allegory is merely decorative illustration of teaching supposed to be accepted on other grounds, the parable has the character of an argument, in that it entices the hearer to a judgment upon the situation depicted, and challenges him, directly or by implication, to apply that judgment to the matter at hand.[9]

A parable is a very important and popular form of speech. Found in other cultures, it was highly esteemed in Israel. A Rabbi was expected to be familiar not only with the sayings of the Sages of Israel, but an adept at creating parables and sayings of his own. Jesus was simply exceptional in the parables he created.

The parables are probably the most characteristic element in the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. They have on them the stamp of a highly individual mind in spite of the re-handling they have inevitably suffered in the course of transmission. Their appeal to the imagination fixes them in the memory and gives them an irreplaceable place in tradition. Certainly there is no part of the Gospel record that has for the reader a clearer ring of authenticity than the parable pericopes.[10]

The parables of the Gospels are true to life and nature. It is not easy to write or speak in parables as a regular didactic method. One of the beauties of the parables of Jesus is that they spanned all through his earthly ministry.

> The hearers find themselves in a familiar scene where everything is so simple and clear that a child can understand; so plain that those who hear can say, "Yes, that's how it is."[11]

Among the special characteristics of the parables of Jesus is the fact that, step-by-step, they reflect with peculiar clarity the character of his good news, the eschatological nature of his preaching, the intensity of his summons to repentance and his conflict with Pharisaism.[12] The parables of Jesus reveal a definite personal character,

a unique clarity and simplicity, a matchless mastery of construction, a conclusion that is inevitable.[13]

Since parables were a common and greatly appreciated method of illustration and communication, the parables of Jesus were similar to the rabbinic parables but far superior to them. Paul, incidentally, was not so fortunate at creating parables. One would have to appreciate his teaching to be able to understand his parable of the olive branches and the stock (Rom 11:16–24).

Scholars differ sharply from one another as to which of the teachings of Jesus should be classified as an allegory, if any at all, especially as they could have been re-interpretations by the Early Church. Snodgrass has questioned the dichotomy between parable and allegory in the teachings of Jesus and argued that Jesus could have used allegories in his teachings. This permits him to re-integrate into the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen elements which were considered by Dodd and Jeremias as secondary e.g. allusion to Isaiah 5, the number of sending of the servants and the stone rejected by the builders.[14] Jeremias[15] and Dodd[16] emphasize secondary parts of the parable. However, in the Matthean account, the allegorical nature of the story is evident.

Landlord	—	God
Vineyard	—	God's people
Tenants	—	Jewish leaders
Servants	—	Prophets
Son	—	Jesus Christ
Fruit	—	Good works, fidelity to the Covenant

Snodgrass interprets the pericope allegorically and sees in the allegory the relationship between God and His people.[17] Jeremias supports the allegorical interpretation and says:

> The vineyard is clearly Israel, the tenants are Israel's rulers and leaders, the owner of the vineyard is God, the messengers are the prophets, the son is Christ, the punishment of the husbandmen symbolizes the ruin of Israel, the "other people" (Matt 21:43) are the Gentile Church. The whole parable is evidently pure allegory.[18]

Crossan however believes that the story in its earliest form was a parable not an allegory and tried to read its meaning on the lips of historical Jesus.[19] It is obvious that Crosson is only attempting a reconstruction based on his ideas, as much as what can be said about the historical Jesus depends on one's perspectives and *Weltanschaung*.

Another point to consider is whether the parable has anything to do with the kingdom. In the Matthean tradition it undoubtedly has (21:43). But Brad Young

does not think so. He believes that either the redactor or Matthew himself interpreted it as being representative of the kingdom of God which he considers highly improbable. He affirms that the parable deals with the sharecroppers of the vineyard and their relationship to the owner.[20] He goes on to say:

> It is precarious to go beyond this theme and look for an allegorical meaning for the vineyard—be it kingdom of God (Matthew), the people, the Temple, the Judaism of the day, the leadership, the land of Israel or some other allegorical interpretation . . . The parable addresses the action of the wicked tenants, and the vineyard is of secondary importance.[21]

This opinion cannot be sustained because it would reduce the parable to a mere story. Why would Jesus tell a story if not to instruct, especially if the story is not a historical fact? Consequently this parable is an authentic teaching of Jesus and it is a parable of the kingdom.

4.2 Interpretation of the Pericope

In preparing for the exegesis of the text, it will be helpful to survey briefly the opinion of scholars on the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen.

C. H. Dodd finds the original milieu of the pericope in the revolutionary attitude of the Galilean peasants since the revolt of Judas the Gaulonite (A.D. 6) which is an attitude of Zealotism towards foreign landlords before the revolt of A.D. 66. He thinks that it refers to an existing situation.[22]

A. Jülicher believes that it is a carefully constructed allegory by the early church with the death of Jesus in retrospect.[23]

Joachim Jeremias says that, especially in Matthew, some of the parables of Jesus are allegorized, e.g. the great supper (Matt 22:1–14); the parable of the Two Sons (21:28–32) and our pericope. He says that the parable in its original setting indicates the offer of the gospel to the poor, the πτωχοι *ptōchoi*.[24]

W. G. Kümmel says that the pericope in its present form is not the original setting. However, it is impossible to work back from an allegory to a simple parable because of transmission and interpretations. The milieu, according to him, is not Galilee in the time of Jesus but the church in the first century influenced by Isaiah Chapter 5. The church identified "the son" with Jesus Christ but in the original setting "the son" could have meant the final messenger. Kümmel goes on to say that no Jew, hearing in the parable the story of the slaying of the "son" could have dreamed of applying it to the sending of the Messiah.[25]

Rudolph Bultmann believes that the allegorical interpretation came from the early church and therefore dismisses the parable as not coming from Jesus.[26]

For T. W. Manson, this parable is proof that Jesus claims to stand in special relation to God, a relation which he himself chooses to describe as Father-Son relationship.[27]

C. F. D. Moule suggests that Jesus, in the climax of the story, the death of the owner's son, predicted that they would kill God's own Son, thereby bringing disasters on themselves by their atrocious deed. In this allegory, Jesus alludes to his unique function and this veiled self-reference to himself is as striking as it is rare in this Gospel.[28] Dan Otto Via says that the parable illustrates the blind folly that infuses the human mind. The violence of the tenants was so wanton that it violated basic human norms of living.[29]

The story of the Wicked Husbandmen is at least a parable and a very serious case can be made for an allegorical interpretation. A lot depends on the scholar's perspective, which would make one lay more emphasis or not on a subject matter. I believe the pericope is an allegory.

This allegory is not what the Early Church could have produced. The context is the immediate irruption of the kingdom of God. The antagonism of the Jewish leaders raged unabated until it drove them to encompass the death of Jesus.

The pericope is both a warning and a threat. Jesus wanted the Jewish leaders to realize the heinousness of their plot and the disastrous consequence of their action. The obvious reference to the Canticle of the Vine (Isa 5:1–7) is a reminder that just as Israel was unfaithful and paid the price for her infidelity with the national calamities of 721 B.C. and later with that of 587 B.C., Israel of that day would not escape divine wrath for slaying the SON.

If the pericope were a New Testament reconstruction, it would not be easy to find justification for it. The Church was not responsible for the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem. There was neither doctrine of atonement or expiation nor any clear mention of the Resurrection. Its background and atmosphere is not post-Easter.[30]

This parable is of great theological importance in that it has direct bearing on another future event in the terrestrial life of Jesus—his trial before the Sanhedrin (Matt 26:57–66). With this allegory, Jesus, for the first time in Synoptic tradition, pointedly confronts the Jewish public in their leaders with his claim that he is the SON. What is more, Jesus advances this claim in a striking fashion by drawing on a phraseology that the heavenly voice employed at Baptism and at the Transfiguration—so as to appropriate for himself the evaluative point of view concerning his identity with God.[31]

4.3 The Text

The parable of the Wicked Husbandmen is one of the two narrative parables preserved in all three synoptic traditions (Mark 12:1–12; Matt 21:33–46; Luke 20:9–19). The other parable is that of the sower (Mark 4:3–9; Matt 13:4–9; Luke 8:5–8). It is important to note the parable of the tenants is one of the twelve parables in the Coptic Gospel of Thomas (65) with synoptic parallels.[32]

Matthew is the most elaborate and the most allegorical. At this point we shall highlight the peculiarities of each Gospel.

4.3.1 Mark

The owner planted a vineyard, fenced it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower. Then he leased it to husbandmen and traveled. At the appropriate time he sent three servants, one at a time, to collect *some* of the fruit. But the husbandmen did not cooperate with the emissaries but rather handled them badly.

They flogged the first, beat the second on the head, and killed the third. After that the owner sent more servants: some they killed, others they thrashed. Then he sent his son. Him they killed and cast out of the vineyard.

The servants were sent *one at a time;* δοῦλον, ἄλλον, ἄλλον, *doulon, állon, állon* ˹a slave, another, another". Neither Matthew nor Luke follows Mark to mention the head injury. Is it a deliberate redactional insertion of Mark to allude to the fate of John the Baptist 6:27 ἀπεκεφάλισεν *apekephálisen* "to cut off the head?"[33]

Mark arranged his narrative in an ascending order presumably to reach a climax. But did he make it? If putting to death was the climax, then it was reached when the third servant was put to death. If for Mark the climax was putting the Son to death, then he made it.

4.3.2 Luke

A man planted a vineyard. There was no mention of a fence, a winepress, or a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and traveled to another country for *a long while;* a detail omitted by others.

At harvest time he sent his servants, one at a time, to collect some (not all) of the fruit. The husbandmen beat the first and sent him away empty: the second they treated shamefully and sent away empty. They wounded the third and threw him out. Then the owner sent his son. Him the tenants killed and threw out of the vineyard.

There is a climax in Lukan narrative. The third servant was not killed and the allegorical conclusion is omitted. Luke limited himself to three instances of sending of servants, one at a time, trimming the three incidents into perfect symmetry. The three sent are δοῦλον, ἕτερον, τρίτον ˺ a slave, another , a third". Though no servant was killed, there is climatic increase in the gravity of the injury done.

4.3.3 Matthew

The owner, called the householder, planted a vineyard, fenced it, dug a winepress, built a tower, and then leased it tenants. As vintage time drew near, he sent his

servants (pl), to collect *his* fruits (not some of them). But the tenants thrashed one, killed another, and stoned the third. He sent many more and they treated the servants in like manner. Finally he sent his son. They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Matthew had his thought pattern—they beat a servant, killed a second, and stoned a third. Was stoning the climax or a mere succession of events? Αποκτείνω "apokteinō" means putting to death especially by the sword. Did the stoning refer to the stoning of the prophets and the various attempts made to stone Jesus?

Matthew, who was the most elaborate, exhibited heavy dependence on Isaiah 5: 1//Matt 21:33. In Luke and Thomas there is nothing of the language of Isaiah: the relationship was between the owner and the tenants.[34]

4.3.4 Similarities

Some of the Synoptic gospels have some points in common.

In Matthew and Mark—the owner built a fence, a winepress, and a tower: in Luke he did none of those.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke—the owner departed from his people for another country and Luke added "for a reasonable length of time."

In Matthew—the owner sent his servants when harvest time was approaching: in Mark and Luke he sent them at the appropriate time. Matthew and Mark consistently used the verb ἀποστέλλω *apostéllō* whereas Luke used ἀποστέλλω once and πέμπω *pémpo* the rest of the time. In Matthew, the owner wanted *his* fruits; in Mark and Luke, he wanted *some* of the fruits. In Matthew, the householder sent servants (pl) at the first instance and many more after that: in Mark and Luke he sent a servant, one at a time. The treatment meted out to the servants differed in each synoptic gospel. In Matthew and Luke—the husbandmen threw the son out of the vineyard and killed him whereas in Mark the son was killed in the vineyard and then thrown out.

It is also worthwhile comparing the Synoptic Gospels with the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas. In this writing, the owner was called *a good man*. It says nothing about the fence, the vat, or the tower. The owner sent a servant, one at a time, to get the fruit. He sent two servants and at the second instance he made excuses for them: "Perhaps they did not recognize him." This is the only tradition that makes any excuse for the tenants. Then he sent his son. Realizing that he was the heir, the tenants kill him. Nothing was said about the circumstances of his death. The Gospel of Thomas then concludes, "He who has ears, let him hear."

From this comparative study, certain conclusions emerge:

The Gospel of Thomas is the simplest text and least theological.

> There is consistency in sending the servants three times which in turn might help to recall the customary pattern of three: three servants in the parable of tenants, three temptations, three withdrawals, and three appeals for prayer at Gethsemani.[35]

By and large there seems to have been the intention of making the death of the son the climax of the text. Even if not the climax, the story reaches a focal point with the killing of the son.

The story demonstrates the impenitence and the bad-will of the husbandmen, a situation which leaves the owner with no other option but to bring them to justice.In fact, he should have done that after the sending of the first servant(s). Mark and Luke say that he will destroy the tenants (they do not emphasize their bad record) and give the vineyard to others. Matthew on the other hand says: "He will evilly destroy those evil men" and give the vineyard to others and Matthew adds "who will give the fruits at the appropriate time" (21:41). Matthew stresses the absence of moral rectitude on the part of the husbandmen and the necessity to give the householder his fruits as and when due.

In Luke, as Jesus was about concluding the parable, the Jews said "God forbid", fully realizing that the foreboding message was addressed to them. However, all Synoptics agree in quoting Ps 118:22 and saying that the leaders would have readily arrested him but for the crowd. It was only Matthew that pronounced the ominous verdict that the kingdom would be taken away from them and given to a nation that would produce its fruit.

Certainly the Matthean tradition is more detailed and more ecclesiological.

4.4 The Historical Setting of the Parable

The story of the wicked husbandmen may appear far-fetched, especially viewed against the patience and the indulgent attitude of the owner; but it has great verisimilitude to life situations in Palestine at the time of Jesus. There were many absentee landlords who leased their vineyards or estates to tenants to receive from them fruits of the land on agreed terms.

A lot had to be taken into consideration in preparing the lease—the weather, natural disasters, and tribal wars. Above all, hard work and honesty of the tenants were a dominant and determining factor on the yield. Laws were enacted to defend the rights of the owner and of the laborers.

Palestine had been overrun by the Romans, but the country had not been pacified. Political, economic, and religious reasons lay at the root cause of social unrests. If large estates were often held by foreigners, it was reasonable to presuppose that agrarian discontent went hand in hand with nationalistic feelings.

Galilee in particular was a disaffected region. Since the revolt of Judas the Gaulonite in A.D. 6, the country had never been pacified. Galileans were temperamentally prone to fight and all rebellion against Rome invariably started in Galilee. If the owner was a foreigner who was away for reasonable time, conditions were in place to refuse rent, murder the messengers, and eventually seize the estate.

> The parable, in fact, so far from being an artificially constructed allegory, may be taken as evidence of the kind of things that went on in Galilee during the half century preceding the general revolt of A.D. 66.[36]

Given the character of Galilean lands, and the fact that Galilee was a zealot stronghold, and also that the zealots and their sympathizers were of the poor tenant class, it seems likely that the parable of the wicked tenants in some way speaks to the violent methods of the zealots and their sympathizers.[37] Most of Galilee, especially along the shores of Gennesaret and a large part of Galilean uplands bore the character of latifundia and were in the hands of foreign landlords.[38] J. Duncan Derrett in his book "Law in the New Testament" devoted a chapter to the "Parable of the Wicked Vinedressers."[39] With scholarly erudition and expertise in rabbinics, he tried to prove that the parable was true to life. Based on this assumption, he interprets all the features of the story in great detail. One of the great merits of his work is the background information on events at the time of Jesus, which certainly throws a lot of light on the understanding of the parable. These points will be discussed and critiqued in the exegetical section of this chapter.

Another document worth referring to is Sifre Deuteronomy 32:9 ξ 312.[40] It is a commentary on the text:

> For Yahweh's portion is his people,
> Jacob his allotted heritage.

This tannaitic midrash preserves an anonymous parable which contains a number of motifs parallel to our text.

> A king had a field which he leased to his tenants. When the tenants began to steal from it, he took it away from them and leased it to their children. When the children began to act worse than their fathers, he took it away from them and gave it to (the original tenants') grandchildren. When these too became worse than their predecessors, a son was born to him. He then said to the grandchildren: 'Leave my property. You may not remain therein. Give me back my portion so that I may repossess it.'

Though the two stories are similar the midrashic document differs immensely from

plot and purpose of this allegory. While the allegory emphasizes that the husbandmen were not only ruthless but also stupid and foolhardy, the midrashic document has another important lesson to teach:

> For the portion of the Lord is his people,
> Jacob his allotted heritage (Deut 32:9).

The Lord is patient with his people and does not revoke his gifts.

For analysis, our text is Matt 21:33–43. We shall make cross-references to other synoptic gospels and occasionally to the Gospel of Thomas.

4.5 The Text—Matthew 21:33–43

33 "Hear another parable. There was a house-holder who planted a vineyard, set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it, built a tower and rent it to husbandmen and traveled.

34 When the time for harvest drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen to get his fruits.

35 But the husbandmen taking his servants beat one, killed the other and stoned another.

36 Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first, and they treated them in like manner.

37 At least he sent them his son saying: 'they will respect my son.'

38 But on seeing the son, the husbandmen said to one another, 'this is the heir: come on, let us kill him and take over his inheritance.'

39 And taking him, they threw him outside the vineyard and killed him.

40 Now, when the master of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those husbandmen?'

41 They answered him: 'He will destroy those evil men in an evil manner and give out the vineyard to other husbandmen who will give him fruits in their seasons.'

42 Jesus said to them; Have you never read in the scriptures

> The stone which the builders rejected
> has become the corner stone.
> This is the Lord's doing
> and it is wonderful in our eyes.

43 Therefore I say to you, that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce its fruit."

4.5.1 The Exegesis of the Pericope

V. 33 Ἄλλην παραβολὴν ἀκούσατε *allen parabolen akousate*. "Hear another parable." The pericope begins with an invitation—nay a command—because the verb is in the imptv.

–to hear yet another parable. Like the preceding parable of the two sons (21:25–32), and the following on the wedding feast (22:1–14), the parable of the wicked tenants makes a judgment on Israel. Here Jesus addresses the Jewish religious leaders who questioned his authority.

The phrase, ἄλλην παραβολὴν, *allen parabolen* is unique to Matthew and is found again in 13:24, 31, 33. It is a clear indication that Jesus makes frequent use of parables while teaching, "indeed he said nothing to them without a parable" (13:34) and Matthew concludes that section saying that by so doing he fulfilled Ps 78:2:

> I will open my mouth in parables,
> I will utter what has been hidden
> since the foundation of the world.

The parable is about a "householder" οἰκοδεσπότης *oikodespótes* who planted a vineyard. οἰκοδεσπότης means "master or steward of a house." It can also mean "a native ruler" as opposed to a "foreign emperor."[41]

οἰκοδεσπότης is a favorite term in Matthew, though found 12 times in the New Testament, it occurs seven times in Matthew out of which six times in the context of parables. Sometimes it is combined with ἄνθρωπος *anthropos* (13:52; 20:1).

> ἄνθρωπος οἰκοδεσπότης bei Matthäus v. 33 ist in dieser zusammenstellung ein Matthäischer Terminus Technicus, der das Verhalten des Menschen zu Gott, dem Herrn, kennenzeichen soll.[42]

While Matthew calls him ἄνθρωπος οἰκοδεσπότης *anthropos oikodespotes*, Mark and Luke designate him simply as ἄνθρωπος, while the Gospel of Thomas calls him "a good man." The advance of ἄνθρωπος to the first position emphasizes its importance.

The Matthean text is dependent on the LXX version of Isaiah 5:2.

Isaiah (LXX) 5:2	Matt 21:33
ἐφυτευσα ἄμπελον	ἐφύτευσεν αμπελῶνα
2 φραγμὸν περιέθηκα	φραγμὸν αὐτῷ περιεθηκεν
3 ὠκοδόμεσα πυργον ἐν μέσω αυτοῦ	ὠκοδόμησεν πύργον
4 προλήνιον ὤρυξα	ὤρυξεν ἐν αυτῷ ληνὸν

Vineyards, date and olive groves, orchard and gardens require more careful cultivation, as the shoots are very tender and delicate. They constitute an on-going investment.[43] This owner built a hedge, a vat, and a tower not only to secure the vineyard but also to make life conditions more comfortable for the tenants. All these constructions indicate that the vineyard is both capital and labor intensive. Moreover, it is obvious that vines have not been planted there before, or at any rate within living memory. Hence we have not only new vines but also untried soil.[44]

The choice of the vine is not only dependent on the desirable allusion to the Canticle of the Vine, but above all because of similarity of content. The image was concrete and suitable for the teaching of Jesus.

For while Isaiah contrasts the care God lavished on the vineyard and the fruit it produced, Jesus, in this parable, describes the excellence of the vineyard but highlights the wickedness of the tenants. Above all, it suggests to an informed reader that the parable is an illustration of God's troubled relationship with Israel, his people.

The mentioning of the fence, winepress, and tower are not made for aesthetic reasons but to illustrate the care and the diligence with which the vineyard was cultivated. Some authors think that the fence, winepress, and tower are secondary. This is reinforced by the Lukan tradition that omits it, though present in Mark. Hence Klaus says that the focal point was no longer the vineyard but the husbandmen and the messengers.

> Nicht mehr der Weinberg steht im Mittelpunkt sondern der Herr, die Knechte und die Boten.[45]

It is true that there is no further mention of the fence, the winepress, and the tower after verse 33, and these have no follow-up in the rest of the allegory, but that does not make them secondary. Moreover all elements do not have equal importance in any narrative. It appears, therfore, that these elements are integral to Synoptic tradition, though they may not be of the same moment as other elements; e.g. the servants, the fruits, the son, the owner. However, link with Isaiah 5 is of paramount importance especially in Matthew who appears to depend on it. Hence "the fence, winepress and tower" should be retained and are of great moment for the correct and full understanding and of the text.

ἐξεδοτο *exodoto* aor. of ἐκ- δίδωμι, *ek-didōmi* which means, "to hand over in agreement, to lease," *verpachten*. The owner leases the vineyard to the tenants on agreed terms.

γεώργοι γεώργος *geōrgos*. "a farmer; one who tills the land." The owner leases his investment to farmers whom he presumes were experienced workers on the land, confident that he would reap abundant harvest from them.

Some authors think that the estate should have been parceled out to different tenants as was the custom of the day; hence the plural γεωργοι could be understood in that sense as well. The lease could be on a long term too.[46] However the text does not say so, at least not explicitly: though such an arrangement was possible, we are not told that was what the householder did.

The owner planted new vines in untried soil. He rented it to farmers, but would have to wait for four years before the vines would begin to bear grapes. During this period he would have to support the farmers, buy manure and supplies for the vineyard, in the hope that in the fifth year he would reap some profit. A new vine was, therefore, a venture not for immediate financial returns but rather for lasting results, benefiting successive generations.[47]

The conditions of the lease were not indicated. From Mark 12:2 and Luke 20:10, the master sent for "some" of the fruit, thereby permitting one to conclude that the owner allowed the tenants to keep some of the fruit. In the Matthean tradition, the owner asked for *his* fruits. Could that imply that he paid them their wages and so could claim the fruits in their entirety? Both arrangements were possible in Palestine at the time of Jesus.

Though the conditions of the lease were not spelled out, from the study of Henning on the subject, one can safely conclude that some of these obligations were included:

- to do all the necessary work in their seasons (pp. 113–115) which included proper irrigation, watering, and weeding.
- avoid causing damage to the property
- bear all costs of maintenance
- at the termination of the lease, hand over the property to the owner.[48] in good condition

The obligation to weed (m.B. Mes 9.4), to work on the property (m.B. Mes 9.5), reduction in rentals in the case of natural calamity (m.B. Mes 9.6), and other general regulations that governed the methods of cutting, uprooting, plowing are to be followed. In cases when they apply, the sharing of the land's produce between the tenant and the landlord are included (m.B. Mes 9.1, 7). It is known that trailing the vine, setting up poles or trellises, providing manure, removing dead stems, and others are time-consuming and above all need dedication and expertise. There are

other regulations in the law which the husbandmen must abide by:

> You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, lest the whole yield be forfeited to the sanctuary; the crop you have sown and the yield of the vineyard (Deut. 22:9).

The cultivation of the vines and other crops were regulated by strict laws of mixed seeds.

> On the first day of Adar, they give a warning of the shekel dues and against (the sowing) of Diverse Kinds (Mishna: Shekalim 1:1).

It is important to note that in Israel, so much attention and importance was attached to the vine that the Mishna had a tractate *KILAIM* devoted to the vineyard and that includes the measurement of the beds, the winepress, the trenches; void space within the hedge which were free from vines.

As *KILAIM* regulates the planting of vines (4–7), in case of non-conformity, the public could interfere and uproot the vines if the laws were disobeyed. These were some of the obligations laid on the farmers to which they were bound. That their task was onerous could not be debated. Could that provide some insight into why they reacted to the master the way they did?

Having provided all that was necessary for the vineyard with the hope of a fruitful yield, the owner entrusted the vineyard to the husbandmen and then departed—απεδήμησεν. *"apedemesen"*

The verb is a compound term ἀπὸ *apo* δημέω *deméō*. δημος *dēmos* means "a district, country, land" and more specifically "homeland." The verb is inceptive aorist, which according to Zerwick, could be translated "he went abroad."[49]

The verb suggests a remote residence or a succession of residences, a sojourn in some remote area. Not much hangs on the location as he was at all material times at an inconvenient distance for direct supervision of the vinedressers.[50]

The verb could also mean that he left the country but not necessarily. Very often rich landowners did not live in the village or farm but in a town or a far away city where life was more comfortable. Obviously, such a man of means would have his superintendents. There in the foreign land he awaited the fruit of his vineyard. Hence Gaechter says:

> Er pflegte aber wie der orientalische Großgrund-besitzer nicht auf dem Lande zu wohnen, sondern in einer größeren Stadt wo es sich leichter leben ließ.[51]

V. 34 *When the time for the harvest drew near:* The word used for "time" is *kairos* and is used by all three Synoptics. It could mean "time of harvest" (Mark 11:13) or the eschatological time (Mark 1:15) or when the Master would return to demand an account from his servants (Mark 13:33–34). Prophetic literature often associates the time of harvest with the appointed time of God's judgment (Isa 17:5; 18:4; 27:12). Hence ambiguity surrounding the term would put listeners on the alert.[52]

However, καιρὸς in our text does not have the definite article and would therefore mean "the agreed time, the appropriate time" not the eschatological time.

> Weiter ist dann die eschatologische Bedeutung von ηγγισεν ο καιρος (Ernte = Heilszeit oder gericht) nicht mehr zu übersehen.[53]

ἤγγισεν ἐγγίξω *engizō* (ἐγγυς *engys* = near) "to make near, to be near." It can have a messianic nuance πεπλήρωται ο καιρὸς και ἤγγικεν ἡ Βασιλέια του θεου "the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Drawing near of the kingdom is found in Matt 3:2; 4:17; 10:7. It means "the acceptable time, the time of redemption." Does this text have any reference to Matt 21:1 where we read: "When they drew near to Jerusalem," which also is in the context of confrontation?

ἀπέστειλεν *apesteilen* from ἀποστέλλω "to send." The verb has the special nuance of "to send with a mandate" whereby the emissary is a delegate of the sender; can act in his person; enjoys the status, dignity, respect, and the recognition conferred on him by the sender. He is therefore an accredited ambassador. Hence it differs from πέμπω, *pempo* that does not have that nuance. All the synoptics use ἀποστέλλω for the first sending but not after that. Only Matthew is consistent with ἀποστέλλω.

ὁ καιρὸς τῶν καρπῶν *ho kairòs tōn karpōn.* "Harvest time, season for fruits." Scholars have noted that the vine gives no commercial profit in the first four years. In fact a new vineyard is notoriously unprofitable. That could partially explain why the owner left for a distant country, even though from the text, it is probable he was an absentee landlord.

Moreover, establishing a vineyard is an expensive investment especially with the provision of supports—manure, water, poles, labor: in fact, more often that not, the investment exceeds the returns. Indeed there is no return worthy of mention until the fourth year is reached.[54] It is unusual for the crop to equal the outlay for the year but in the fifth year, some profit can be expected.

The owner sent his servants—τοὺς δούλους αὐτοῦ. *tous doulous autous*. The word, δοῦλος *doulos*, is found in the New Testament both in the primary meaning of "slave" whom Varro describes an *instrumentum genus vocale* and in its secondary

meaning of "servant, officer, dependent." Derrett prefers this primary meaning "otherwise the sending of the son loses some of its force."[55]

It does appear that the term δουλος should not be taken in its primary meaning of "slave" but rather as "servants." The verb *apostellō* argues for this. This increases the guilt of the husbandmen for treating accredited ambassadors with such indignity (2 Sam 10:1–14). These were officials delegated to act on behalf of their master. Officials of kings were simply called "slaves" of the king.

Matthew says that the owner sent his servants (pl.) while Mark and Luke speak of a lone servant. It does appear that Matthew's use of the plural is deliberate. Most probably he imagined that the vineyard, given all the favorable conditions, would produce such abundant harvest as would need many servants to transport.

> Wenn Mk and Lk nur jeweils von einem sprechen, muß man an denjenigem Sklaven denken, der die Verantwortung für den Transport trug.

Moreover, since there was a contract between the owner and the tenants, some of them could serve as witnesses. Also from the Old Testament perspective, God represented as the owner, acted through intermediaries like *Moses* (Num 12:7; Josh 1:2, 7); *David* (2 Sam 8:2). In the New Testament God acts through *angels* (Luke 1:8–22; 26–38), God did act through *Israel* his servant (Isa 43:10; 44:1; 48:20). Consequently, the Matthean tradition in sending more than a servant, viewed especially from the Matthean regular concept of God as king, is very understandable.

The owner sent the servants at the appropriate time to bring the fruits. This verse reminds one of Ps 1:3 where the tree planted by the streams of water yields its fruit in due season. Also there appears to be a major dependence on Ps 1:3, judging from the words occurring there and their sequence in the LXX.

In Jewish law, the produce of the fourth year would technically be "the first fruits." The rules guarding the fruit of young trees, found in the Mishna, the ORLAH', are very strict. The fruit of trees and of the vine could not be enjoyed till the fourth year.

> When you come into the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden; three years it shall be forbidden to you, it must not be eaten. And in the fourth year all their fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to Yahweh. But in the fifth year you may eat of their fruit, that they may yield more richly for you (Lev 19:23–25).

If the fruits were to be enjoyed in the fourth year, they would have to be redeemed. Because travelers used to help themselves to the grapes, vineyards which were still *Orlah'* were marked with potsherds, but in the fourth year, they were marked with clods of earth.

> A Fourth Year Vineyard must be marked by clods of earth, the trees of Orlah-fruit by potsherds.[56] (Zeraim, Maaser Sheni v.1.),[57]

although

> The leaves and the shoots and the sap of vines and newly fashioned grape-berries are not forbidden under the laws of Orlah of Fourth Year (Zeraim, Orlah 1:7).[58]

The question arises: When did the owner send his servants: before the fourth year, in the fourth year, or after the fourth year? Since Jews were forbidden by Lev 19: 23–25 to enjoy the fruit of the vine before the third year, and since the fourth year was "the first fruit," it can be presumed that the owner sent his servants in the fifth year.

> When the harvest approached in the fifth year, he sent tenants to collect some of the income.[59]

Derrett holds a different view. He says that right from the first year it would be possible for the owner to receive something by way of rent. No matter how small or insignificant, it would be advisable he did so for it was a firm ground for establishing ownership. If it was not spontaneously given, he should demand it. He even narrates how a priest sent for two figs from his orchard and was furious with the tenants when they refused them under the (false) impression that he would not come personally and chastise them. Hence it was important that the owner should make his position clear by sending his servants to receive the agreed amounts a stated times.[60] Leon Morris following Derrett believed that people could establish a claim to a vineyard if they could prove that they had undisputed possession of it for three years (Mishna, B. Bathra 3.1).[61]

It is obvious from the text that the parable is not concerned with the modalities of payment as much as the actual payment. The parable highlights the fact that when payment was due, the husbandmen refused to give the owner his dues.

Another important feature in the Matthean narrative is that he calls the fruits *his fruits*. Mark says that the owner was to receive ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν *apo ton karpon* ⌜some of the fruits" (pl) (Mark 12:2) and Luke ἀπὸ τοῦ καρποῦ *apo tou karpou* "of his fruit"⌝ (sg) (Luke 20:10). Matthew on the other hand emphasizes that the owner sent *his servants* to collect *his fruits*. Fruits are in the plural to underscore that the fruits of the vineyard belonged to him. However, neither context, nor grammar, nor syntax gives enough ground to press that all the fruits of the vineyard belong exclusively to the owner.

Nonetheless, Matthew emphasizes ownership: the vineyard, the servants, and

the fruits belong to the owner. In v. 41 the owner would receive the fruits without any qualification.

Although the details of the present lease are not available, what was in vogue in those days was common knowledge. The owner received between a quarter and a half of the produce. Hence Gaechter says:

> Es ist nach der Landesseite vorausgesezt daß der Pachtnis in Naturalien abgeliefert wurde von einem viertel bis zum Hälfte des Gesamtertrages.[62]

The position of the owner was clear from the narrative but the reaction of the husbandmen was sudden swift, and decisive. There is a sudden change, a turn from the spirit and flow of the narrative. There was no prior complaint, no dialogue. The unforeseen change is indicated only by και which in Hebrew is *waw avversivum*. Και meaning "but" is found in the New Testament: Mark 12:12; John 14:30; Acts 10:28b; 1 Cor 16:12b.

With the sending of the servants, the focus shifts from the vineyard to the husbandmen, who in contrast are characterized by a string of initiatives of quite a different kind—*seizing, flaying, killing,* and *stoning.* A cruel game now ensues between the owner and the tenants, what Wolfgang Trilling calls *ein grausames Spiel.*[63]

There seems to be an allusion to the various punishments and manners of death in the Council.

> The Court had power to inflict four kinds of death penalty: stoning, burning, beheading, and strangling. R. Simeon says (their order of gravity is) burning, stoning, strangling, and beheading (Sanh 7.1).

The Matthean tradition, by the succession of verbs, expresses the aggravation of the situation, death by stoning being the worst.[64] In this, it is in agreement with R. Simeon.

The Synoptics do not agree in all the details about the ill treatment meted out to the servants. Mark has his peculiarity—that the servant was hit or wounded in the head—ἐκεφαλίωσαν *ekephalíōsan* (12:4). Could that possibly refer to the decapitation of John the Baptist? Moreover, a Jewish way to resist an unjust aggressor or an exaggerated claim is to break the teeth of the foe (Ps 3:7; 58:6; Job 29:17). Probably hitting on the head included also breaking the teeth to reject what was considered the unjust claims of the owner. Matthew, however, has the following sequence; flaying, killing, and stoning.

> Die drei Ausdrucke verprügeln, töten, steine werfen' sollen die Behandlung veraunschaulichen, welche die erstgesandten wie auch die auch ihnen gesandten Sklaven erfuhr.[65]

δέρω *derō* = "to flay," but in its weakened form it means "to flog, to whip." The verb has a variety of meanings including the beating of waves into the boat (Mark 4:37). It occurs 12 times in the New Testament.

δερω technically means "flaying off of skin." Lightfoot thinks that it is not amiss to render the verb as "to beat or to whip" because the forty stripes save one did miserably flay off the skin of the poor man.[66] In Aramaic, the verb is סופג hence the expression סיפג את־הארבעים—beaten with forty.[67]

ἀπέκτειναν□*apekteinan* from ἀπὸ-κτείνω *apo- kteinō* means to kill and technically to kill by the sword hence the preposition ἀπὸ.

ἐλιθοβόλησαν, λιθο-βολέω (λίθος + Βάλλω) *lithos* + *ballo*, "to stone." Gaechter understands it to mean "to throw stones at people to scare or chase them away", because after the servant had been killed, stoning would no longer make sense.

> "Warfen steine nach" um sie zu vertrieben. Das Wort findet sich noch in Mt 23:37 (Lk 13:34) heißt dort aber "steinigen," kann also nicht hierher übertragen worden sein. Dann nach toten "hat steinigen" keinen Sinn.[68]

Stoning of animals (Ex 21:28, 32; Ex 19:13; Heb 12:20) and of individuals (Ex 8: 26; 17:4; Lev 20:2; 24:16; Numb 15:35) was not unknown in Israel. A false prophet, a dreamer was put to death (Deut 13:5; 18:20; Jer 28:16). Scripture mentions stoning of prophets of God's messengers (2 Chr 24:21). Stoning suggests execution on the basis of religious apostasy.

Sanhedrin 7.4 enumerates crimes punishable by stoning—false prophecy, idolatry, blasphemy, sacrificing children to Molech, breaking the Sabbath, adultery, and bestiality. They also include cursing parents, sorcery, being a stubborn or a rebellious son.

This was the manner of execution by stoning. The place of stoning was twice as high as a man. From the top of this, one of the witnesses striking him on his loins felled him to the ground: if he died of this, well; if not, the other witness threw a stone upon his heart. If he straightaway died, that sufficed; but if not, he was stoned by all Israel for it is written:

> the hand of the witness shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people (Sanh 6.4).

Though the text says that some of the servants were stoned, biblical tradition records only one stoning—of the prophet Zechariah, son of Jehoiada (2 Chr 24:21–22). Nehemiah took the position of ascribing violent death to the prophets of the monarchical era.

> Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you and they committed great blasphemies (Neh 9:26).

2 Chr 36:16 speaks of the Israelites mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets. Other punishments given to the servants of God besides stoning includes being sawn in two, killed by the sword, going about in skins of sheep and goats, being destitute, afflicted and ill-treated (Heb 11:37).

In Matt 23:37 Jesus laments:

> O Jerusalem killing the prophets
> and stoning those who are sent to you (Matt 23:37).

In John's Gospel, the Jews made many attempts to stone Jesus (8:59; 10:31; 11:8).

It is possible that putting God's messengers and prophets to a violent death took place more than was recorded in the Old Testament scriptures. But the prophets, as a general rule, were persecuted for announcing the word of God.

V. 36 *Again he sent other servants, this time more numerous than the first, and they treated them in like manner.* One cannot but be amazed at the action of the owner. If he sent the first batch of servants who were ill-treated, and some stoned, others killed, why would he send more as there was no evidence that he took some precautionary measures to ensure their safety and the success of their mission? The narrative does not say he was sending a punitive expedition force that would overwhelm the husbandmen by sheer weight of numbers.

Bammel wanted to explore the meaning of "more servants"—more in number or higher in rank—"mehr an Zahl oder höher an Rang" and he continues: "Darum fügt Mt 21:36 πλειονας = mit grosserer vollmacht Begabte ein ([69]).

The text says that the tenants treated the second group of servants in like manner. Since this is an unrealistic approach to a grave situation, could the term "servant" have a deeper meaning (an allegory) than one would immediately envisage? Could the prophets be implied by the word "servants?"A quick survey of the Old Testament will indicate that God sent prophets repeatedly to Israel. In Jeremiah we read:

> From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day (7:25).

The prophets were called servants (Jer 24:5; 26:5; 35:15; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6). Some commentators believe that in the servants one should see the prophets. According

to Beare, Matthew thinks of the servants as the prophets of Israel and suggests that God shows his patience and good will in increasing his efforts to win Israel to obedience by sending more and more prophets[70] Hubaut believes that "sending" was deeply embedded in OT theology and that *doulos* stands for the great servants of God especially the prophets.

> ἀποστέλλω a un grand relief déjà dans l'AT et dans le NT pour designer l'envoi en mission par Dieu. δουλος qualifie les grand "serviteurs" de Dieu en particuliere les prophets dans l'AT, le judaisme et le NT.[71]

Some have even wondered whether in the second sending there was an allusion to the division in the Hebrew Bible between the Earlier and Latter Prophets. Hence Klauch believes

> Er bringt eine Sendung von zwei Gruppen was bei ihm sicher im Dienst der allegorischen Deutung der Knechte als Propheten steht, ohne daß man daraus zwingend schließen kann, hier werde auf die früher und die späten Propheten (oder auf die vor und nach dem Exil) angespielt.[72]

The likelihood that the two sendings could refer to the distinction between the Earlier and Latter Prophets is very remote. The sending of the second group of servants and the treatment they received from the husbandmen highlight the progressive disrespect and violence on the part of the husbandmen. In the Gospel of Thomas, the owner sent a servant on two instances. According to Luke, he sent a servant on three occasions (20:10–12) while Mark teaches that he sent a servant three times and after the third servant was killed, he sent many others. In Matthew he sent servants in the first instance, after which he sent many more numerous than the first time. In all four traditions, the servants were ill-treated and some were even killed. The husbandmen made their point: they rejected the owner and his claims.

The very unfolding of the narrative evokes the strong suspicion that Matthew is alluding to Yahweh's sending of prophets to Israel so that his people could turn their hearts to God and produce the fruits of repentance. As the parable unfolds, the hearer will affirm or deny his allegorical intent.

The contrast between the owner and the husbandmen is becoming more evident. The owner sends more servants while the husbandmen kill more of the servants. The owner exhibited commendable forbearance. He did not meet force with force nor nullify the contract.

V. 37 When the mission of the second group of servants failed, the owner did not give up. He was confident, nay optimistic, that he could effect a change of heart. He decided to send his son. One cannot help wondering why the owner was

so simplistic and naïve as to send his son, unarmed and unprotected to a people with a history of violence, vice, and bloodshed. The reason he gave: "they will respect my son," is pitiable; to say the least.

Derrett, however, thinks differently and believes the story was true to life. He said that since the owner could not plead his case through an agent, he had to do so through a representative. The son could not have gone to the husbandmen unattended. Moreover, the son's errand was to induce "respect" in the tenants.[73]

It might help at this moment to highlight some aspects of the parable which are remote from real life.

- It is doubtful that a rich owner could hand over a new vineyard, a very important and expensive investment to tenants untried by him, for whose probity of character he could not vouch. Judging from the text, there was no close monitoring. Rather he would send his servants not to oversee the work at the vineyard but to receive the fruits at harvest time.
- It was the case of new vines on untried soil. If he received the fruit only in the fifth year, one could presume that the husbandmen were on their own for five years without supervision.
- With the ill-treatment given to the servants, it was possible for the owner to institute legal action against the tenants and seek redress. It is difficult to understand why he should continue to send servants without adequate safeguards.
- As the servants were progressively mistreated, one needs an explanation why he should send more and more servants? They had demonstrated a history of violence, cruelty, and bloodshed!
- With these hard facts at the background, why should he send his son, his only son, his beloved son? Such an action was certainly crazy. But even the wild imagination of the vinedressers, that by killing the son they would become the heirs, is lunacy.
- After such a harrowing experience, would the owner be willing to lease the vineyard to other tenants?

One cannot forget that this is a parable: but for a parable to teach convincingly, it should be true to life otherwise it would be equiparated to a fable. How could one explain these irreconcilable standpoints?

Trilling says it is a parable of unsurpassable force, and can hardly be said to keep strictly to the framework of a general example in the narrative and the closing words actually draw the conclusion in explicit terms.[74] If it was not true to life, Derrett says, if Jesus taught by irrational and inexplicable parables, it would be a noteworthy feature of his mission.[75]

It is evident that this parable is not entirely true to life. Jesus is telling a story that

would illustrate the way a compassionate and loving God acts towards sinners not the way a businessman would act to protect his investment.[76] It is a parable depicting sin most treasonable and love incomprehensible. In the same breath, the parable had the uncanny style of proclaiming the justice, the righteousness, and the holiness of God.[

At last, he sent his son. The adverb, ὕστερον, *hýsteron*, is one of the peculiarities of Matthew for, out of the eleven occurrences in the New Testament, it is found seven times in Matthew. It means that the owner had exhausted all the possibilities in the normal course of events. The story wants to regard the owner—the father—as ready to send his only son as his last ditch effort to bring the husbandmen around.[77]

> L' envoi du propre fils, unique et bien aimé la[isse prevoir qu'est ce la derniere tentative, car on ne voit pas qui pourrai encore etre envoyé. Le mot à cependant un grand relief, car il veut dire non seulement que le fils "en derniere lieu" après une longue suite de prophets (Heb 1:2) mais aussi que c'est la derniere occasion offerte a vignerons.[78]

Moreover, Mark says that he has one left to send, a son, whom he loved and then continued: ἀπέστειλεν αὐτὸν ἔσχατον πρὸς αὐτοὺς which can be translated ⌜he sent him last of all to them" or "at last, he sent to them his son". This could add an apocalyptic dimension to the text; the apocalyptic coming of the Son.

Matthew introduces the son without any qualification. Luke calls him: "my son, the beloved" τον ὑιόν μου τὸν αγαπητόν (20:13), while Mark goes further to say, "he had yet one, a son, the beloved." ἔτι ἕνα εἶχεν, ὑιὸν ἀγαπητόν (12:6). This reinforces some biblical texts: Gen 22:2, 12, 16; John 3:16; the apparition at Baptism (Mk 1:11; Luke 3:22; Matt 3:17; and the theophany at the Transfiguration: Mark 9:7; 17:5.

Klauch thinks that ἀγαπητός in this context means "sole heir."

> Durch das Wort ἀγαπητός wird natürlich die Bedeutung von κληρονόμος (Alleinerbe) weit aus dem profanen Bereich herausgehoben und mit seiner religiösen Bedeutung in den Rahmen der unchristlichen Tradition gestellt (Rom 8:17; Gal 3:29; 4:1; Heb 1:2; 9:15).[79]

Derrett says that the owner could be making his last effort to retain his hold on his property: it could be equally construed that he had transferred some, if not all his investments to someone younger and fitter than himself.[80]

The text is very clear in itself. The owner was convinced that out of respect for him, the husbandmen would behave better this time, accord the son the respect and rights due to him as heir-apparent and live up to the terms of the lease. Following

the policy of doggedly repeating gentle measures, he sends his son, his only son, his beloved son and heir, confident that he would accomplish what the servants had failed to do.

The son is of higher rank: he is far superior to the servants. That is why the owner reckoned: "They will respect my son." The verb, ἐντραπήσονται, εν - τρεπω means: "to look inside, ponder within, fill with shame, turn about, command respect." In the middle-passive it means "to turn about, hesitate, especially feel misgiving or compunction, give heed or regard, respect, reverence."[81] Probably the owner imagined that on seeing the son, the tenants would be so embarrassed at their past behavior, promptly sue for peace and ask for pardon.

V. 38 The husbandmen upon seeing the son said:" This is the heir. Come on, let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours." A plot was hatched forthwith and summarily executed.

The sighting of the son recalls the story of Joseph (Gen 37:18–20). His brothers sighted him from afar and before he came near them, they conspired his death. They said: δεῦτε, ἀποκτείνομεν αὐτὸν *deute, apokteinomen autòn* (v. 19), "Come on; let us kill him" which are the *ipsissima verba* of Matthew 21:38. Both the brothers and the husbandmen considered Joseph and the son respectively an embarrassment and an obstacle to their ambition and plans, and hence they felt the need to get him out of the way, if their plans were to materialize.

The sight of the son stimulates the unhealthy feelings of anger, jealousy, envy, avarice, and possibly hate. If he was removed, the undisturbed possession of the vineyard would undoubtedly be theirs.

> The tenants live in a self-centered world, and want to be lords not tenants.[82]

And the tenants kill him to take over the inheritance. The acknowledgment that he is the heir has the following implications:

- It heightens the tenants' guilt by deliberately killing one whom they knew to be the heir.
- It raises the question: To whom does the vineyard belong?
- It illustrates the blind folly of evil.[83]

This said as some introduction we resume a detailed analysis of the text.

V. 38 That the husbandmen thought differently is brought out clearly in the Greek by οι δὲ. "They, however." They upon seeing him, however, said within themselves or to one another—εν αυτοις—can be translated either way. "This the heir. Come, let us kill him and take over *his* inheritance."

δεῦτε = "come on." It is the adverb plural of δευρω *deurō* "Come on, let's do it." This would be translated in the Hebrew by the cohortative. It describes a unanimous concerted action. The reason for their action is that the death of the heir would make it possible for them to take over the vineyard.

Κληρονόμος *klerónomos* is usually translated as "heir." But Derrett believes it has the basic meaning of "acquirer, gainer," whether of the estate of another or indeed of any property to which one had previously no shadow of claim.[84] This opinion, however, is highly hypothetical: it has not substantiated etymologically nor by any document.

The action of the tenants was malice at its zenith. They had beaten, robbed, and murdered and according to the Matthean tradition not once, not twice. Becoming bold as brass because they had not been brought to justice, they take the daring and defiant step of murdering not slaves any longer but the son of the owner, the heir to the property.

Leon Morris adds that the tenants could have argued that if they treated also the son very badly, the father who was a great distance away, could think that he had had enough and would desist from his claim to the vineyard.[85]

The narrative becomes dramatic. One can almost visualize the scene played out before one's eyes. With three verbs all in the aorist to depict precision, decision, and dispatch, and one action progressively and immediately leading to the other—they *took* the son, *threw him out* of the vineyard, and *killed* him ,λαβόντες, ἐξέβαλον, ἀπέκτειναν..

One can even read in the actions of the husbandmen a cry of lament of the prophet Jeremiah: 7:24–26.

> But they did not listen, they did not pay attention; they followed the dictates of their own evil hearts, they turned their backs to me and not their face. From the day your forefathers went out of the land of Egypt till the present day, I have sent you all my servants, the prophets, day after day, early and late. But they have not listened to me, have not paid attention: they have become stiff-necked and behaved worse than their ancestors. (Translation: mine).

The allegory is so written to portray and dramatize the wickedness of the tenants that no one could miss it. Their depravity must be as starkly emphasized as possible. Some commentators would like to say that the crime of the tenants was so heinous that they did not even care to bury the body.[86] Jeremias adds:

> The feature of the story simply emphasizes the full extent of the husbandmen's iniquity: they go on to wreak upon the corpse the final indignity of throwing it over the wall and denying the slain so much as a grave.[87]

Reasoning along the same line, Kümmel says:

> Die Pächter töten also den Sohn und werfen seinen Leichnam umbegraben auf das Feld, verweigen ihm also die einfachste menschliche Ehre.[88]

Trilling, expressing his revulsion from the deed says it was a most shameful human act, unparalled in its heinousness.

> Welch schreckliche Geschichte menschlicher Bosheit, die nicht mehr zu überbieten ist, wird da erzählt.[89]

They killed the son as though he were a common criminal and cast him out of the vineyard. The killing of the son is narrated differently by the various traditions. The Gospel of Thomas, 65, says that the son was killed: no further details were given. Matthew 21:39 and Luke 20:15 declare that the tenants threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Mark, on the other hand, says that they killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. There are arguments which can be brought forward to support each tradition.

Matthew says that they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. The verbs depict rage, violence, disrespect, decisiveness, and finality. In the Matthean tradition, he would be thrown out lest they committed murder in the vineyard, thus defiling the vineyard. That would make the vineyard unclean and contaminate the fruits of the vineyard, and no one would buy them. The Mishnah teaches:

> These convey uncleanness by overshadowing: a corpse or an olive's bulk (of the flesh) of a corpse . . . the skull or any (severed) member of a corpse or any (severed) member from a living man that still bears its proper flesh (Ohol 2.1).

Ohol 18:1 legislates how grapes can be gathered in a grave area.

Following the Markan tradition, one would have to conclude that the tenants murdered the son in the vineyard and so polluted it and that their avarice and hatred drove them to actions they did not weigh their overall consequences.

Derrett, going into his usual details, suggests that the son came with attendants. The husbandmen, after ejecting the attendants, cornered the son and murdered him in the tower. It would not be done near any part of the vines, because a death in their proximity would be a breach of a code of conduct which the vinedressers, particularly at this juncture, would certainly obey. They would not endanger the sale of the crops. The blood of a corpse entering the soil near the roots of a vine would, in practice, lower the value of the crop and of the vineyard.

The death blow would be struck in the tower and the body could be carried alive as far as the wall. The blood of man at the point of death does not carry with it the problems mentioned above. They would not bury him either. They would leave that to the first passer-by or to occupiers of the adjacent field. Moreover, a corpse has a right to be buried where found (B. K. 81a).[90]

It is not necessary to go into all the meticulous details of Derrett. To appreciate the parable, it is sufficient to note that the climax of the wickedness of the husbandmen lay in the murder of the son and it is for this and other acts of misdemeanor that they are punished.

One can see some affinity with the Johannine text of the crucifixion of Jesus, John 19:17. A comparative study of the texts reveals the following:

John 19:17		Matthew 21:39	
παρέλαβον τὸν Ιησοῦν	they took Jesus	λαβόντες αὐτὸν	taking him
ἐξῆλθεν	they went out	ἐξέβαλον	they threw him out
ἐσταύρωσαν	they crucified him	ἀπέκτειναν	they killed him

Does the killing of the son outside the vineyard insinuate the crucifixion of Jesus outside the gates of Jerusalem? In Heb 13:12–13 we read:

> So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore, let us go forth to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.

Matthew and Luke require the son to be killed outside the wall in order that it may be made plain that the son is to be understood as Jesus.[91]

4.5.2 Attempted Appropriation of the Vineyard

Why and how could the tenants imagine that they could take over the vineyard? Joachim Jeremias believes that since the son was ἀγαπητός, hence the only son, the removal of the sole heir would mean unhindered possession of the property.

> The arrival of the son allowed them to assume that the owner was dead and that the son had come to take up his inheritance.[92]

He also added that the husbandmen could claim the right of *primi occupantis* if the sole heir was dead, and on the death of the owner, they could make a case of intestacy.[93]

Derrett carried out extensive study of the tenants and their relationship with the owner which I shall summarize because some of the views of Derrett throw some light on the parable.[94]

The vinedressers were *ariysiym*. An *ariys* was a tenant—farmer and they had no wonderful reputation to honesty and fair play. Most of these tenant –farmers always wanted to exploit their masters which made their masters want to treat them with an iron fist. It does appear that these tenants were entitled to a fixed proportion of the produce—unlike other tenants who would pay a fixed amount to the owner and keep the rest of the fruits for themselves.

The rent must be paid, be it even a token. Nonpayment of rent was considered means of establishing ownership. Servants had to be sent to the tenants every year as nonpayment for three consecutive years would thereby mean claim to the property. This was the law of hazaqah חזקה, i.e acquisition by some form of prescription. As Kümmel noted, a threefold repetition was needed in Jewish Law and custom to make a title secure.[95]

Derrett goes on to say that the *ariysiym* were known to convert their tenure into ownership even by dishonest means. He quotes Sonc 174 about a man in possession of another's property:

> If you will sell it to me, well and good; but if not, I shall suppress the mortgage deed and say I purchased it outright.

He also quotes the Mishna Ket XIII.7

> If a man went beyond the sea and the path to his field was lost, Admon says: He may go to it by the shortest way. But the sages say he must buy another path even if it costs a hundred *minas*, or fly through the air.

Derrett concludes:

> The basic legal rule is that a claimant, who claims by a reasonable (even if fake) title, is owner in law, if he has enjoyed the produce for three consecutive harvests.[96]

The presence of the son would complicate matters. Evidence of murder or robbery would render a claim impossible but a semblance of theft or murder could suffice.[97]

However, S.R. Llewelyn, in a scholarly and well researched article based on the study of early documents and the Mishnah argues vehemently, nay convincingly, against some of the tenets of Derrett. Here are some of his arguments:

- The parable should be understood in the context of threat of judgment against Jewish leadership.
- There were deeds which were not leases but labor agreements: wages were paid to the workers, rents were not collected from them.
- Would the landlord lease the vineyard before it was redeemed? Such a lease would amount to economic nonsense.
- In the case of default on the part of the tenants, the owner could petition authorities to investigate his claim and take necessary action (y. B. Bat. 3.3).
- The tenant's claim to ownership could only be valid if the lease agreement never came to light and they alleged that a sale or a gift had occurred or that the property had been pledged in debt.
- One reading Derrett's article would get the impression that the rabbinic law served the person who acted with fraudulent intent.

  The law of *hazaqah* was not applicable. There is no mention of a three-year period. Indeed M. Ket 2.2 assumes that the usurper's claim was overturned if disproved by witnesses. The law of *hazaqah* went through various stages of development in the first and second centuries.[98]

To sum up, it is not likely to produce arguments with which to prove that the tenants had any legal stand to lay claim to the vineyard. Their use of violence and unfair measures could never legally win them the vineyard.

There is no scholar who would not appreciate the hard work and the depth of research Derrett conducted in rabbinic studies to better comprehend this parable. However, the details he went into had limited advantage and success towards a sound exegesis of this pericope. It is important to recall the key message of the parable: the husbandmen had become so avaricious, wicked, and disrespectful, that by all means, fair and foul, they wanted to keep the vineyard which they had come to consider theirs, contrary to all principles of justice.

V.40 Verse 40 ushers in a new trend of argument in the narrative. Jesus is sure that the Jewish leaders understood the parable, the gravity of the issue raised and its relevance to them. He changes from a narrative style to a question.

Is this a rhetorical question or a mere stylistic device used by the evangelist? Matthew clearly indicates that the Jewish leaders answered the question and by so doing condemned themselves (cfr 2 Sam 12:17). In Luke it was Jesus who answered the question he himself had posed and when they realized that it applied to them, recoiled from the answer and said "God forbid" (20:16). Assuming that it was a rhetorical question that was put, Klauch says:

> Die rhetorische Frage ist bei Mt 21:40f in einen Dialog umgestaltet wie Matthäus es often tut (12:10; 22:42) cfr 2 Sam 12:1–7; 2 Sam 14:1–20,

> 1Kg 20:39ff. Die Antwort hat stilitisch Die Forme paranomasie (κακοὺς κακῶς). Das ist kein Semitismus sondern klassisches Griechish.[99]

The answer is two-fold and double-edged:

> κακοὺς κακῶς ἀπολέσει
> ἀμπελῶνα ἐκδώσεται ἄλλοις γεωργοῖς
>
> He will destroy those evil men in an evil manner:
> he will lease the vineyard to other tenants.

There is some literary affinity between this verse and Isaiah.

Isa 5:7	Mt 21:40
ὁ γὰρ ἀμπελὼν κυρίου σαβαωθ οἶκος	κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος
τί ποιήσω (5:4)	τί ποιήσει

By this answer, a number of affirmations is made.

- The owner is no longer ἄνθρωπος—a mere man—(Mark and Luke) or ἄνθρωπος οἰκοδεσπότης□a certain householder—(Matthew): more striking is that all three synoptics now call him ὁκύριος τοῦ ἀμπελώ νος *ho Kyrios tou ampelonos* the Lord of the vineyard—and the three agree on the question: τι ποιησει? what will he do? He is called κύριος. Is that a direct reference to Yahweh? Does Matthew imply that just as the friend of the bard in the Canticle of the Vine is Yahweh, in like manner, in this parable, the owner is Yahweh?
- The owner is alive and his arms are not shortened. He will come to administer retributive justice.
- Though he may have been patient, he is not a weakling. He will act with firmness and decisiveness.

The Lord of the Vineyard will destroy those evil men in an evil manner. This text is generally understood to mean that he would put them to a shameful death. But what is the force of the verb ἀπολέσει *apolesei?* -"destroy?"

The tenants are evil men. The Lord of the vineyard has power over life and death and he means to exercise that power. He will bring them to a painful disgraceful end. Gen 9:6 says clearly:

> Whoever sheds the blood of a man
> by a man shall his blood by shed;

for God made man in his own image
(cfr. Exod 21:12; Lev 24:17; Numb 35:16–34).

The answer is problematic especially in agrarian policy. Crossman has a different view. He thinks that the idea of punitive expedition against the tenants is improbable against the background of the rest of the story. If the owner had such force at his disposal why didn't he use it earlier instead of relying on the pathetic hope for respect which now becomes ludicrous. Moreover, that an owner after such an experience would again give out his vineyard strains credulity; it would be contrary to the probabilities of agrarian experience.[100]

But it is here that one discovers the lesson of the parable. The owner did not punish, not that he could not, but he did not want. The punishment he gives, even if it capital punishment, is rightly deserved to the wicked husbandmen. Leasing of the vineyard is an accepted way of looking after the vineyard: the method is good and because it is good, it can be used again. It is only the tenants who were wicked, and need to be moved out of the scene.

The Lord of the vineyard will not permit his investment to go waste: he will not permit his designs to be frustrated. Since the use of tenants is good, he will find a new group of tenants who will give him his heart's desire.

These new tenants will recognize that the fruits of the vineyard belong to the owner. The text does not make any explicit provision for the tenants keeping some of the fruits. The fruits (pl.) belong to the owner and he means to keep them.

The vineyard will not provide fruits sporadically or spasmodically. The plants have their seasons (pl.) and they will produce their fruits in their seasons. That was the only reason why the vineyard was set up. Consequently, the objective of the vineyard will be realized.

V. 42 A new phase in the dialogue is introduced by Jesus asking a question: "Have you never read? and quoting Ps 118:22–23. Ps 118 is a very popular psalm in Israel's worship. It is the last of the Hallel Psalms (111–118) and was probably used at the feast of Tabernacles, especially as the procession entered the temple, v. 19. Its popularity can be proved from its use at Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem (cfr Matt 21:9 // Ps 118:25–26). Such being the case, it is to be expected that every Jew, nay the Jewish leaders, would be familiar with it.

The text about the stone is found is Isa 8:14–15;

He will become a sanctuary
a stone of offense
a rock of stumbling
to both houses of Israel
a trap and a snare
to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

Also in Is 28:16 we read;

> Therefore thus says Yahweh Sebaoth: "Behold I am laying in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tested stone; a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: He who believes will not stumble."

This text of Ps 118 quoted by Jesus was applied messianically to Jesus in the New Testament (Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7) while Romans 9:33 quotes Isa 28:16. The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Luke stops with v. 22 while Mark and Matthew add v. 23. "It is the Lord's doing and is wonderful to behold."

The quotation from Ps 118 is to be linked not with the preceding verses of our pericope but with the following. The parable summarizes the *Heilsgeschichte* of the Old Testament—from the call of Abraham, the infidelities of Israel, their rebellion which is about to be consummated in what the Jewish leaders were plotting.

> The parable tells in allegorical form the main events in the dealings of God with his people: covenant, prophecy, the coming of Christ, Crucifixion, the Church. One notable event is absent—the Resurrection. This is now made good by the addition of the Old Testament quotation which foretells the reversal of man' judgments by God.[101]

The verb ἀπεδοκίμασαν□ἀπὸ and δοκιμάξω *dokimázō* means "to approve, sanction, approve after scrutiny, pass as fit to serve."[102] It means that the stone was thoroughly examined by the builders and rejected as unfit for building.

Κεφαλὴ γωνίας *kephale gōnías*□*eckstein*—"head of corner." It is a stone placed in a corner on which the structure depends; the capstone. It is not likely it should be translated as "foundation stone" (Eph 2:20) but rather as "capstone," the stone which holds the walls of the building together.

It means therefore that the stone which the builders examined and rejected as unsuitable has become the capstone. The judgment of the builders, despite their professionalism and expertise is incorrect because the stone was destined to do the work which God, the architect designed for it.

Jesus now applies the text to the parable. The son was rejected, killed and thrown out of the vineyard as a person of no consequence. It was precisely because of him that the anger of the owner would descend on the tenants. The death of the son was the greatest tragedy in the career of the tenants.

The rejection of the stone was seen by New Testament writers as prefiguring the rejection of Jesus and his subsequent vindication by God when he raised him from the dead. This is truly the Lord's doing, a wonder to behold. So he became the corner-stone.

The builders—the wicked tenants as well as the chief priests and the elders—

were unable to recognize the value of the stone and consequently rejected it as valueless, but for the Lord, the stone was of immense value and became the corner stone for the new dispensation.

The citation of Ps 118:22 from the LXX makes an abrupt transition from the figure of the vineyard to that of a building. The transition has some problems because it is not easy to see how to equate the murdered son with a stone at first rejected and later elevated to a key position. The citation supplies what was missing in the parable—a reference to the exaltation of the son.[103] The tenants by killing the son destroyed themselves, and the builders by rejecting the stone which later became the capstone proved themselves incompetent.

Vs. 45 VERDICT. Now comes the solemn pronouncement of Jesus. It begins with διὰ τοῦτο *dia touto*—"on account of the above reasons." The parable was a prelude and a preparation for this pronouncement. It was an authoritative response to those who objected to the authority of Jesus. Since Jesus' authority was challenged by the Jewish leaders, he now teaches that he has the power and the authority not only to expel the tradesmen from the temple but has more than that: in his person the kingdom of God is established in a final and definitive manner because he is the SON. The vineyard does not belong to the husbandmen: it belongs to the owner—GOD, and he is the son and the heir.

> "Therefore I tell you" is a solemn pronouncement and there follows a most explicit statement in Matthew that there is going to be a new people of God."[104]

The text reads: "the kingdom of God" instead of the usual Matthean "kingdom of heaven." The kingdom of God here is certainly not God's kingly rule but the *sphere* of his rule; nor a future hope but a present reality; not a spiritual ideal but a concrete community.[105] The kingdom of God (personal) indicates God's presence in his people's history and his gracious saving work among them.

The kingdom of God will be taken away form YOU. They will be identified in v. 45 as the Chief Priests and Pharisees while in v. 23, they are the Chief Priests and the elders of the people. Although the Elders could come from any of the major sects among the Jews, the distinction, I believe, should not be pressed because it does appear the text has the same audience in view, because they are the religious leaders and official representatives of the people.

4.6 Conclusion

However, there is more to it. We need to ask how v. 43 stands in relation to v. 41. In v. 41, the owner will bring the wicked tenants to an evil end and lease out the

vineyard to others. In v. 43, the kingdom will be taken away from you. Should there be an identification of the tenants with the religious Jewish leaders? If they are the same, what would be the reason to emphasize the leasing of the vineyard to others while the tenants are no more? Is destruction ἀπολέσει synonymous with death? Does the text simply say that the tenants would be punished and part of the punishment would be to lease out the vineyard to others? On these matters authors differ.

Robert Smith says that the application of vv. 42–45 is restricted to the leaders: they will be merely replaced not killed.[106] Beare says that the tenants no longer figure the people of Israel but only those who have responsibilities of administration. They had declared that the tenants deserved death but v. 43 threatens them only with the cancellation of the lease.[107] Young does not think that the parable refers to Jewish leadership.

> It is precarious to go beyond this theme (the leadership of priests) and look for an allegorical meaning for the vineyard—be it the kingdom of God (as in Matthew), the people, the Temple, the Judaism of the day, the leadership, the land of Israel, or some other allegorical interpretation. None of these interpretations may be imposed upon the parable by its context.[108]

It can also be construed that in the concluding part of the pericope, only a limited group (priests, elders, and Pharisees) have been at fault and that God will remove them from their positions of authority and entrust Israel to others, to more faithful leaders. This opinion is rooted in the Old Testament where Yahweh promised that he would replace unfaithful shepherds with devoted ones (Jer 23:1–4) or God himself would be the Shepherd or commission his servant David to take on the task (Ezk 34:1–24).

However, taking the parable as a unit, it does appear legitimate to conclude that the religious leaders were acting on their capacity as representatives of the people and official proponents of Judaism of their day. In questioning the authority of Jesus, they were championing the cause of orthodoxy and integrity of Jewish faith. They teach and decide for the nation and chart its course. Hence what they say and do in that capacity affects the destiny of the nation, just as the sin of any leader (though it may not be the sin of the nation) brings punishment on the nation. The people of Israel suffered for the wrong decisions of Rehoboam (1Kgs 12), Ahab (1Kgs 16:29–22:40), Ahaz (1Kgs 16), and Zedekiah (2Kgs18:1–20:21).

An important question now arises: Is the limited application of the allegory at variance with the parable itself and with the Canticle of the Vine.? In the parable all the tenants are guilty not only the overseers. In the Canticle of the Vine, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judea are guilty. In this allegory, is it the people that is guilty or only their leaders? It does appear that only the leaders are blameworthy even though all the people may eventually suffer for their wrong decisions.

The destruction of the wicked husbandmen will usher a new beginning—the leasing of the vineyard to others who will bring the fruits in all seasons. It is important that the vineyard bears fruits in all seasons.

The kingdom will be given to a nation ἐθνει *ethnei*. The text does not say it will be given to the gentiles for in that case the word used would have been ἐθνέσιν *ethnesin*. The kingdom will be given to a new nation whose origin or composition is not indicated. The only requirement for membership is that the members bear fruits at the appropriate seasons.

This nation would be derived from all nations, Jew and Gentile, who now constitute "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people set apart" (1 Pet 2:9// Exod 19:5–6). The horizon goes beyond Israel.

Thus there is continuity and discontinuity. The kingdom of God continues but now it is focused on a "nation."

> But the composition has changed, not just by the replacement of the leaders whose future the parable has highlighted, but by a new principle of a belonging of which has been set out in 3:8–10; 7:15–23; 8:11–12; 39–42; 21:28–31. It is a nation that produces fruit, not one whose membership is automatic.[109]

This nation is in direct contrast with Ezra 9–10 where inter-racial marriage was considered a betrayal of Israel's faith. Consequently, absolute need was felt at that time not only to rescind such marriages but even to send away the women with the children. This regulation was enforced with utmost severity especially among the priests and the Levites. But here a new Israel is born, not according to the flesh.

The parable has a definite Christological focus especially seen as a response to the challenge of Jesus' authority by Jewish leaders. The murder of the son brings about the inevitable destruction of the tenants and the rejection of the stone results in its marvelous exaltation. The parable, therefore, teaches the parallel images of the rejection of the son and the rejection of the stone.[110]

As the parable stands, the exaltation of the son cannot be portrayed by the vineyard parable: it needs to be linked to another text, this time to Ps 118 and it achieves its full meaning in the rejection of Jesus. The stone then rejected is now exalted.

The parable on its own stands as a dramatic story inviting judgment from hearers and the application is clear enough without allegorizations. Jesus did regard his ministry as the culmination of God's dealings with his people, and the guilt of all righteous blood from Abel to Zechariah would fall on that generation (Matt 23:35–36).

Mark placed this parable in its true historical context, in the passion narrative, to which this part of the gospel is an introduction. The parable can be seen as enforcing the challenge "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." (Matt23:37–39).

The parable also helps to illuminate those sayings of Jesus in which he foretells his own death, and the disaster which will befall the Jewish nation. The parable makes a moral judgment on the situation but by implication it may be said to "predict" his own death and judgment on the slayers.

The Jewish leaders did understand the parable and did realize it was addressed to them. Their spontaneous reaction of "God forbid" of Luke (20:10) proves this apodictically. Surprisingly, with the message of the parable still ringing in their ears, they wanted to arrest Jesus thereby proving perfect relevance of the parable to the Jewish nation. So they repudiated the parable, its meaning, and its application to them.

But most directly the parable of the wicked husbandmen points ahead to the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin (Matt 26:57–58). At the trial, Jesus is faced again by the same group to whom he had earlier addressed the parable. When placed on oath by the High Priest, to tell the Sanhedrin whether he was the Messiah, the Son of God (Matt 26:63) Jesus could not deny his identity.

> What the High Priest does at the trial, therefore, is to seize on Jesus' own claim, convert it from allegorical speech into literal speech, and hurl it back at Jesus as a weapon by which to destroy him.[111]

The first tenants are deprived of their charge and new comers take their place. The new people will be constituted by the blood of the covenant shed by Jesus himself (Matt 26:28). The incomprehensible marvel takes place. The fruit will no longer be human endeavor but the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22).

CHAPTER FIVE

The Vine in John's Gospel

5.1 Introduction: The Vine in John's Gospel (15:1–8)

Chapters 13–17 of John are unique in Gospel tradition. John's Gospel is the gospel of the WORD and the word of the WORD. John distinguishes himself from the Synoptics by long, important and solemn teachings of Jesus, often introduced by "Amen, Amen I say unto you," a phrase which occurs 25 times in his gospel.

John records only seven signs of Jesus, which in most instances, are occasions for solemn and revelatory teachings. Jesus taught individuals—Nicodemus (3:3–21) or the Samaritan woman (4:10–22). He also taught the crowd after working a sign; e.g.

- the cleansing of the temple (1:13–25)
- the sick at the pool of Bethzatha (5:1–27)
- the multiplication of loaves (6:27–66)
- the cure of the blind man (9:35–41)

or at festivals

- at the Passover (1:13–25; 6:22–66)
- at an unnamed Jewish feast (5:19–47)
- at the feast of Tabernacles (7:16–52; 8:12–59)
- at the feast of Dedication (10:22–38).

In all these occasions, Jesus revealed his Person and his mission. But in the farewell discourse (13:13–17:26) we do not have in any other place in the Bible, a series of uninterrupted speeches by an individual. It has no parallel in the synoptic tradition. Hence we come to study the pericope of the vine, which in the present arrangement of John's gospel, is found in the farewell discourse.

This farewell discourse consists of three parts:

- the first farewell speech (13:31–14:31)
- the second farewell speech (15:1–16:33)
- the prayer of Jesus (17:1–26).

The second farewell speech has three parts:

- Jesus, source of life in the community (15:1–17)
- Tension between the disciples and the world (15:18–16:15)
- Sorrow in suffering and future joy (16:16–33).

The teaching of Jesus on the vine and its branches which is found in 15:1–6, contains two paragraphs that are closely related to each other: vv. 1–4; vv. 5–6.

15:1–4	15:4–6
(i.) I am the true vine (1a)	I am the vine (5a)
(ii.) Every branch of me (2a)	You are the branches (5a)
(iii.) The fate of the fruitless branch (4)	The fate of the fruitless branch (6)
(iv.) Necessity for indwelling to bear fruit (2)	Necessity for indwelling to bear fruit (4, 5, 6).[1]

Scholars do not agree on the overall organization of vv. 1–17 and a review of literature indicates that opinion of scholars can be grouped into four.

A) Scholars like Lagrange[2], Bultmann[3], and Becker[4] argue for a twofold division of 15:1–17 with a break at 15:8, thus yielding two subsections: 15:1–8; and 15:9–17. The first subsection develops the figure of the vine while the second teaches love within the community.

Rudolf Bultmann can be said to be representative of this group and he did a scholarly research work which can be summarized as follows:

- Both 15:1 and 15:9 begin with reference to the "Father"
- The imptv "abide" 15:4 is repeated in 15:9
- "You are clean" 15:3 is parallel to "You are my friends" (15:14)
- The prayer of the disciple will be heard (15:7 and 16)[5]

B) The second group holds to a twofold division but makes a break after 15:8; either at 15:10[6] or at 15:11.[7] The first subsection 15:1–10 (11) develops the theme of remaining in the vine and in Jesus, while the second 15:11 (12)-17 focuses on the love of disciples for one another and concludes with a literary inclusion.[8]

C) The third group argues for a twofold division but with a break at either 15:6 or 15:7[9] and the second unit consisting of 15:7 (8)-17. Verse 7 serves as a transitional verse either as a conclusion to the preceding or an introduction to what follows. The first develops the figure of the vine while the second is a parenetic development of the figure.

D) The fourth group opts for a threefold division with the first break at either 15:6 or 15:8; the second at 15:11 and the last section is 15:12–17.

> 15:1–6—the figure of the vine
> 15:7–11 or 9–11—love and the mandate to keep the commandments and to remain in that love
> 15:12–17—the love of disciples for one another.[10]

The work of Fernando Segovia was very helpful in this critical study.[11]

It does appear that the first opinion is to be preferred because it indicates clearly the unity between the figure of the vine and the necessity to bear fruit.

The second part of the farewell discourse (15:1–16:33) deals more fully with some themes only mentioned in the first 13:31–14:31, namely

"the return of Jesus"	14:18–21	16:6, 22
"Love shown through obedience"	14:21	15:10
"the departure and the return of Jesus"	14:19	16:16
"the bequeathal of peace"	14:17	16:33
"the flight and the denial of the disciples"	13:36–38	16:32
"the new commandment"	13:34–35	15:12, 17
"the indwelling of Christ"	14:23	15:4–7
"the Holy Spirit"	14:26	16:7–15
"requests will be granted"	14:13	15:7

However, the second part includes other themes not found in the first: hostility from the world (15:18–16:4), and future revelations of the Holy Spirit (16:12–15). The second part projects into the future, to the fate of the disciples, to fellowship within the community.

Even though there is some parallelism between the first and the second part of the farewell discourse, a closer study will reveal that there are some notable differences. The second while taking up some themes modifies their perspective significantly.

In the first part, the accent was on the departure of Jesus; that the disciples would be left orphans: in the second part the emphasis was on union with Christ, and unity among believers. In the first part the emphasis was on Jesus revealing himself; in the second it was on union with Jesus and fraternal charity in the community.

15:1–17 is a literary unit, but even so, it can be subdivided into vv. 1–8 and vv. 9–17 with vv. 1–8 dealing exclusively with the vine. But these subsections have much in common; Bultmann says "v. 9–17 läuft parallel zu v. 1–8," with the first having as its theme "remain in me" and the second "remain in my love."[12]

The close relationship between vv. 1–8 and 9–17 cannot escape the attention of any casual reader. Both speak about

"remaining in the vine"	(4 and 9)
"remaining in the love of Jesus"	(7 and 9)
"remaining in Jesus to bear fruit"	(4, 5, 8, and 16)
"requests will be granted"	(7 and 16)

However, even with all these similarities, there is a major development in vv. 9–17. The image of the vine gives way to the person of Jesus and "servants" gives way to "friends."[13]

Coming to our pericope, vv. 1–8, we note that these verses speak about the vine, its relationship to the branches, and the necessity to bear fruit. It is in line with Old Testament traditions, where the vine is expected to bear sound and abundant fruit. The distinctive feature of this pericope is the need to remain in the vine to bear fruit.

This necessity is highlighted by the structure of vv. 1–8. In keeping with the threefold pattern proposed for each major section, the literary structure of this pericope can be outlined as follows:

a) 15:1–2 the vine—Jesus
the vinedresser—the Father
the branches—the disciples

b) 15:3–7 This is the central section of this sub-unit and the theme is the need to abide in Jesus.
– the disciples are pruned
– without Jesus nothing is accomplished
– their prayers will surely be answered

c) 15:8 – the Father will be glorified
– the disciples will bear fruit in plenty
– they will be known as disciples of Jesus

5.2 The Context

15:1 begins abruptly with the proclamation: "I am the true vine." Such introduction is not usual with John, the only exceptions being 1:1 and 10:1. However one could

argue that the pericope actually began with 14:31—ἐγείρεσθε *egeiresthe*, ἄγωμεν *agomen*, ἐντεῦθεν *enteuthen*,□"arise", "let us go", "hence": an idea also found in Matthew 26:46 and Mark 14:42. However, there is marked difference in meaning between this statement in Johannine and Synoptic traditions: for while in the Synoptics the command is to rise to meet the enemies of Jesus; in John it appears to be an invitation to move either from the Cenacle or to a new agendum.

In Matthew and Mark, the words were uttered when Jesus invited the disciples to get up from sleep, to shake up themselves from slumber and stupor to meet the enemies led by Judas:

> Behold the hour is at hand and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see my betrayer is at hand (Matthew 26:46)

In Mark we read:

> It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see my betrayer is at hand (Mark 14:41b-42)

In John, however, we read:

> The ruler of this world is coming: he has no power over me.
> But I do as the Father has commanded me. . . .
> Rise let us go hence (John 14:30–31)

The adverb , ἐντεῦθεν, "hence" should be taken seriously. In itself it can have three nuances:

> Location: hence, thence, from here
> Temporal: henceforth, thereupon
> Causal: thence, from that source, therefore, in consequence[14]

It is not very difficult to see the similarity between the Johannine and the Synoptic texts. In Matthew and Mark, it is Judas leading the mob; in John it is the ruler of this world. In Luke, Jesus calls that time "your hour and the power of darkness" (22:53); in John, the evangelist noted that when Judas left the apostolic college for his deeds of darkness, "it was night" (13:30).

Taking the text as it is, one would wonder whether Jesus was inviting the disciples to rise from the couch, or to go out of the Cenacle. Chapter 18:1 says that after Jesus had said *all these things*, he crossed the Wadi Kidron. It is obvious that in

Chapter 15, Jesus continued his farewell discourse. But was he on his way to the Garden of Olives, crossing the Wadi Kidron?

Scholars are not agreed on the context of Chapters 15 and 16. Lagrange is open to the possibility that the second part could have been pronounced before the first for some of the following reasons:

> the promise to depart and return caused consternation among the disciples in 16:16 while it did not in 14:19.

In 16:5 Jesus lamented that none of the disciples inquired of him where he was going whereas in 14:5 Thomas did. Hence Lagrange concludes:

> . . . . XVI,5 parait anterieur à XIII, 33.36 et
> XIV,5; mais d'autre part dans XV, 26 et
> XVI, 7, le Paraclet est censé connu tel
> qu'il est annoncé dans XIV, 16:17[15]

It has also been suggested that the materials contained in Chapters 15–17 were spoken by Jesus in the streets of Jerusalem or in the temple precincts overlooking the golden vine of Herod's temple.[16] This opinion taxes probability too far. It is not easy to imagine Jesus talking to the Eleven as they snaked their way through the narrow streets and hope that the Eleven would understand and appreciate such important teachings. It is difficult to imagine that such a teaching so profound and so novel would be given in such circumstances or that John would intend that to represent the course of events.[17] Haenchen corroborates this view:

> If one were to think of this discourse as being spoken while in transit, the result would not be a realistic picture.[18]

Moreover, the solemn prayer of Chapter 17, if recited then, would surely be out of context.

The theory of displacement has been proposed as a solution, and for sake of brevity, we consider the opinion of two scholars, Bernard and Bultmann, to illustrate the point. Bernard thinks that the arrangement of the farewell discourse should run as follows in order to have a logical sequence of thought:

> 13:1–31a
> 15
> 16
> 13:31b-38
> 14
> 17 [19]

Bultmann, on the other hand, makes the following suggestion:

13:1–20
17
13:31–35
15:1–27
16:1–33
13:36–14:31 [20]

But there is not sufficient evidence to support the theory of displacement of texts. No major manuscript or codex has any such arrangements. "The evangelist is not interested in itineraries,"[21] and the movement of the gospel is dictated by theological rather than by chronological and topographical considerations.[22] There must have been cogent reasons why the text has come down to us in its present form. It is therefore the task of exegetes to go beyond the sand of times and discover, if possible, the reason(s) for the present ordering of the text. That certainly would be a more scholarly approach than attempting to re-write and re-arrange the gospel. Consequently, we do not welcome the theory of displacement, at least in its present form.

Another important question to study is the form of speech used by Jesus when he said "I am the true vine." As scholars do not agree on different classifications of forms of speech, this is not an exception. It is still a matter of debate whether 15:1–8 is a metaphor, a parable, an allegory, a simile, or a symbolic teaching.

Lagrange says that this literary form is unique and so calls it "Parabole-Allegorie" and goes on to say that it is "genre mixte de la parabole juive."[23] Borig calls it "Bilrede" and says it is a uniquely Johannine form of expression that brings together parabolic and allegorical elements. This form is not metaphoric but literal—Jesus is the true vine.[24] Schnackenburg calls it "figurative discourse"[25] while for Brown it is "mashal," a Jewish term which covers all figurative illustrations without distinction.[26]

This pericope has certain characteristics:

a) It is not a narrative: it is not a story.

b) There is identity between Jesus and the vine.

c) This form of speech is unique to our pericope.

However, there is some resemblance between 10:1–6 and 15:1–8.

ἐγώ εἰμι *ego eimi* 10:7, 9, 11, 14.	15:1, 5
I am the gate of the sheepfold 10:8, 9	I am the vine 15:5
I am the good shepherd 10:11, 14	I am the true vine 15:1

Just as the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (10:11, 15, 17) is distinguished from the hireling who flees at the approach of the thief (10:8, 10) and the wild beast (10:12), in like manner the true vine is cultivated by the Father who cuts and prunes the vine so that it can bear more fruit, while the worthless ones are cast into the fire (15:6).

In 10:6 the pericope is called παροιμία which is a generic name for a figure of speech. However in Chapter 15, it would have been difficult to reconstruct an actual parable out of general statements on viticulture.[27] However, in contrast to other sayings using the ἐγὼ εἰμι "I am" formula, and speaking figuratively, this image is developed in a powerful way. We prefer to use the terminology of Schnackenburg and call it "Figurative discourse."

5.3 The Background to the Image of the Vine

Jesus calls himself "the vine, the true vine." What is said in this section presupposes all that has been said about the vine in the preceding chapters. Why did Jesus call himself "the vine?" What was the background to the use of that imagery?

The opinions of scholars can be divided into three, namely:

a) The Eucharist as the background

b) The Old Testament as the background

c) Extra-biblical sources as the background.

5.3.1 The Eucharist as the Background

Some authors believe that since Jesus used wine in the eucharistic celebration of the Last Supper, and if the farewell discourse was pronounced after the Last Supper, the celebration could have given rise to Jesus calling himself the vine.

> If Chapter 15 is originally the account of the Last Supper, and moreover if the original account of the Last Supper included an account of the institution of the Eucharist, now utilized in Chapter 6, then the real reference to the *real vine* would have followed closely on that to the bread of life and its eucharistic reference (hardly appreciable in its present position) would have been unmistakable.[28]

Feuillet says that Chapters 15 and 16 can be viewed as an alternative to or a continuation of the farewell discourse and therefore thematically tied directly to Chapter 13 which speaks about the Last Supper.[29] Van den Bussche went further to say:

> Déjà à Cana (2, 1–11) la quantité et la qualité du vin furent un présage de la plenitude du salut qui serait communiquéé a "l'Heure"[30]

According to those who hold this opinion, the image of the vine is the Eucharist. Like John, one passes from the idea of revelation to the idea of salvation and eternal life. Bernard concurs and goes on to say:

> We take the view that the vine of the allegory was directly suggested here by the wine of the first Eucharist, which has just been celebrated.[31]

There is some literary affinity and even dependence between Chapters 6 and 15 of John. Marks calls the cup of the Eucharist "the fruit of the vine:"

> Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the *fruit of the vine*, until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God (14:15).

Didache gives thanks to our Father ὑπὲρ τῆς ἁγίας ἀμπέλου Δαυὶδ τοῦ παιδός σοῦ [32] "for holy vine of your servant, David."

Guilding, however, argues differently and proposes that the background be sought in the feast of Tabernacles. Her view is so unique that it needs to be quoted at length.

> The Feast of Tabernacles sets forth God as the giver of abundance—the rainfall, the sunshine, and the fruit of the vine; at Tabernacles, Jesus shows himself as the giver of living water, the light of the world and the true vine. . . . The theme of the Supper Discourses is that all these Jewish feasts are fulfilled in Jesus and his Church and that a single Christian Feast, the Eucharist, is the fulfillment of the entire Jewish festal system. It is for this reason that we have in the Supper Discourses a recapitulation of the cycle of Jewish feasts placed in the historical setting of the Last Supper.33

It will not be easy to prove apodictically that 15:1–8 was not pronounced after the Last Supper. If the farewell discourse is taken as "unum quid," it becomes easy to see dependence of our pericope on the cup of the Eucharist. But if the image of the vine were said to be eucharistic because of the wine of the Eucharist, it should be logical to call every theme of the Farewell Discourse eucharistic because it was used after the eucharist celebration or in that context. That certainly cannot be said. Consequently other explanations have to be sought.

5.3.2 The Old Testament as Background

Some see in the Old Testament the background for the figurative discourse on the vine. Israel has been repeatedly called the vine (Jeremiah 5:10; 12:10–11; Ezekiel 15:1–6; 17:5, 10; 19:10–14; Psalms 80:9–12) and also the vineyard (Isaiah 5:1–7; 27:2–5). Some think that the wine refers to Israel as a sign of the love and the election of which it was the object. Planted and protected by God it ought to have produced fruit in holiness and justice.[34] Bruce thinks that the vine refers both to Israel and to Jesus; in teaching that he is the true vine, Jesus says he is the true Israel.[35] Barrett says that the vine is one of the most prized of plants and in allegorical usage naturally represents the most privileged among nations and men. Hence he believes that the pericope on the vine is taken from OT background.[36]

Very important to our study is a quotation from Ben Sirach:

> Like a vine I caused loveliness to bud
> and my blossoms became glorious and abundant fruit.
> Come to me, you who desire me
> and eat your fill of my produce. . . .
> Those who eat me will hunger for more
> and those who drink me will thirst for more. (24:17–21)

Worthy of mention is the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (2 Bar. 36–39) where the vine which opened its mouth, spoke and destroyed the cedar, prince of iniquities, is the Messiah.

> And it will happen when the time of fulfillment is approaching in which it will fall, that at that time the dominion of my Anointed One which is like the fountain and the vine will be revealed (no. 39).[37]

5.3.3 Extra Biblical Sources

There are some who prefer to quote extra biblical sources as the basis and foundation for the figurative speech of the vine. For brevity we shall discuss only the opinion of Bultmann.

Bultmann believes it is derived from the Mandean Tree of Life sometimes represented as the vine

> Wie der Mythos von einem Lebenswasser und Lebensbrot träumt, so auch von einem Lebensbaum.

Then he goes on to say:

> Der Weinstock ist das Lebensbaum.
> Und wie vom ὕδωρ ξῶν und vom
> ἄρτος und φῶς τῆς ξωῆς geredet wird,
> so konnte es auch heißen ἡ ἄμπελος τῆς ξωῆς.[38]
>
> "The vine is the tree of life. And as one would speak
> about the living water, bread and light of life,so could
> it also be called the "vine of life".

There are a lot of sayings from Mandaean literature that speaks about the vine. In the Mandaean religion not only the heavenly messenger, Manda dHaije, but a host of beings from the realm of light are spoken of in terms of the vine.

> Manda revealed himself in Judaea,
> a vine appeared in Jerusalem
> before whom is no wickedness. (Ginza 181,27).

Manda is called the Vine which in Ather was over the heavens and the earth

> Du bist der Weinstock, der Du im Ather uber
> dem Himmel und uber der Erde warst (Lit. 68, 7&8).

This vine is even an object of prayers.

> On the banks of the great Jordan of the first life
> there stands the wondrous vine
> before which my daily prayers and praises ascend.(Lit 218, 9–13).

Hibil, one of the beings from the realm of light was called "the Soft Vine", which was planted in a luxurious plain and the Great Life was the planter (Ginza 301, 11–14).

The genuine shoots need to be united with the vine:

> Thy pure shoots shall be united with thee
> and shall not be cut off (Lit. 253.1).

The vine shall bear fruit otherwise it will be cut off.

> The vine which bears fruits arises,
> and that which does not is cut down . . . .

> whoever will not be enlightened and instructed by me
> will be cut off and falls into the great Sea.
> (Das Johannesbuch der Mandaer p. 204,34–38).

In Ginza p. 24,14 we read:

> Root out the bad vine
> and bring a good
> and plant it instead.

It is evident that Mandaean literature has striking similarities with Johannine ideas e.g. the origin of the vine, its careful planting, the need to bear fruit, the trimming and pruning of fruitless branches. Did John, therefore, depend on Mandaean literature?

Before we give our opinion on the background to the figurative speech, we would like to make an observation from St. Matthew's Gospel. Following the Matthean tradition and chronology, it would seem that Jesus employed the imagery of the vine more frequently in the last days of his earthly life. This is evident from:

> the parable of the workers in the vineyard (20:1–16)
> the parable of the two sons (21:28–32)
> the parable of the wicked husbandmen (21:33–43)

We would also add the Lukan story of the fig tree planted in the vineyard (13:6–9).

It is very evident that the image of the vine was used extensively both in Israel and by Jesus as a useful source material for instruction. Now we give our opinion on the origin of the figurative discourse on the vine:

- The pericope on the vine is unique because no clear story is told nor is anything said about the fate of any particular vine or vineyard; rather there are general statements on viticulture. Moreover, the whole pericope is governed by the powerful ἐγὼ εἰμι.
- There does not seem to be any polemics directed against any one or any group.
- Even if the context were the Last Supper it does not seem that the pericope refers *directly* and *immediately* to the Eucharist. There is no mentioning of the disciples drinking wine, the fruit of the vine, and no connection is made with the blood of Jesus.
- The thrust of the argument is union with Jesus. Jesus is the real vine, the fulfillment of all that the vine is expected to be. It is the vine more than any of the three royal plants of Israel that bears degenerate fruit. It is the vine

more than any of these plants that the images used in the pericope are best suited—trimming, pruning, immanence, withered branches being cast into fire, and abundant fruitfulness.

- Judaism can hardly be expected to be in question because any comparison should be between Judaism and the Church not with the person of Christ.
- The main thought is not the vine as the Church but of the vine as representing Him who is the source of the Church's life.[39]

Here, Jesus is imparting a solemn teaching. It is part of the farewell discourse and consequently a rare opportunity to say all that should and must be said. He uses the image of the vine not to continue the Old Testament theology but to give a teaching that is radically new. Hence Barrett says:

> What must be noted here is a twofold transformation of the traditional material which John has effected and which is visible in both form and the substance of the parable.
>
> a) John withdraws the point of the parable from the eschatological crisis of the ministry of Jesus and applies it to the continuous life of the Church.
>
> b) the vine ceases to represent Israel and becomes a Christological definition applied to Jesus himself.[40]

The image of the vine is from the Old Testament but no longer as referring to Israel or to anyone else. The image was borrowed from the Old Testament but radically transformed. The vine is now Jesus and the thrust of the argument is immanence to bear good and lasting fruit. A much more careful study reveals that John depended more on OT for his theology which is very rich in itself than on extra-biblical traditions. So we do not believe that John depended on the Mandaean religion for his thoughts.

5.4 The Text

1 I am the true vine,
and my Father is the vine-dresser.

2 Every branch of me not bearing fruit
he cuts trim,
but every branch in me that bears fruit,
he prunes that it may bear more fruit.

3 You are already clean,
thanks to the word I have spoken to you.

4 Remain in me and I in you.
As a branch cannot bear fruit by itself
unless it remains in the vine,
so neither can you
unless you remain in me.

5 I am the vine: you the branches.
He who remains in me and I in him
he it is who bears fruit in plenty
because apart from me
you can do nothing.

6 He who does not remain in me
will be cast away like a branch: he withers.
They collect the branches, throw them into the fire,
and they are burnt.

7 If you remain in me
and my words remain in you,
ask whatsoever you will,
and it will be done to you.

8 In this is my Father glorified
that you may bear much fruit,
and you will be my disciples.

5.5 Exegesis

v. 1 "*I am the true vine*." This verse begins abruptly with the proclamation: "I am the true vine." Such introduction is not usual with John, the only exceptions being 1:1 and 10:1.

This is not the only Johannine text where Jesus speaks metaphorically of himself. Other texts are:

6:35 "I am the bread of life"
6:51 "I am the living bread"
8:12 "I am the light of the world"

10:7	"I am the sheep gate"
10:9	"I am the door"
10:11, 14	"I am the beautiful shepherd"
11:25	"I am the resurrection"
14:26	"I am the Way, the Truth, the Life"
15:1	"I am the true vine"
15:5	"I am the vine."

Here we encounter the "I AM" formula. Used in 15:1 and repeated in 15:5, it is the last in the farewell discourse and also the last in the Fourth Gospel. The emphasis is not only on the "I", the subject, but also on the predicate; on what Jesus wants to say of himself. The predicate is not a definition but a description of an aspect of the life and ministry of Jesus, how he stands in relation to the Father and to humanity.

In a manner reminiscent of his public ministry, Jesus combines a particularly vivid and concrete metaphor with the "I am" formula, "the bread of life (6:35, 48), "the sheep gate" (10:7,9), "the beautiful shepherd" (10:11, 14), and as in each of these previous examples, this metaphor of the vine occurs also twice (15:1, 5). Characteristic of Johannine symbolism, Jesus uses seven metaphors about himself: bread/living bread, light, sheep gate/door, shepherd, resurrection, way, truth, and life, and finally the vine. In the last of his seven self-declarations, in this gospel, Jesus declares himself to be the true vine.[41]

Another peculiarity of the "I am" formula in this pericope is that besides being the last in John's Gospel, it is the only one that has an addition: "My Father is the vine-dresser."

5.5.1 The "I Am" Formula

It is a formula of identification found in Old and New Testaments and in non-biblical writings. It is a formula of recognition and Bultmann calls it "Offenbarungsformel," a statement through which one reveals his identity: a formula of self revelation.

Bultmann classifies *Offenbarungsformel* into four:

> *Die Präsentationsformel* : "Introduction"—By this one introduces himself and answers the question: "who are you?" "I am El Shaddai." Gen. 17:1
>
> *Die Qualifikationsformel; "Description"*—It describes the nature of a subject and answers the question: "what are you?" with the possible answer "I am the First and the Last." Isaiah 44:6
>
> *Die Identifikationsformel; "Identification"*—The speaker identifies himself with another person or thing. Sometimes it is identified with the Präsentationsformel. The goddess Ishtar is quoted as saying "I am all: the one who was, who is and will be."

> *Die Rekognitionsformel: "Rcognition"*—It is different from the rest because ἐγὼ—I, is the predicate. It separates the subject from the others. In answer to the question "who has done all this?" The answer is "I."[42]

Raymond Brown also notes that in John's Gospel one can distinguish three uses of "I am:"

- It can be used absolutely: "Before Abraham, I AM" (8:58) Other instances are 8:24, 28; 13:19. Moreover I AM in John is a style for the deity that cannot be shared with another.
- It can be used predicatively. As Jesus was walking on the lake, he reassured his terrified disciples by saying, "I AM, do not be afraid." (6:20)
- Jesus told the soldiers who came to arrest him at Gethsemani "I AM" (18:5)[43]
- But the fact that those who hear it fall to the ground when he answers, suggests a form of theophany which leaves men prostrate in fear before God.[44]

Moreover "I am" has solemn and sacral use in the Old Testament, in other New Testament writings, in Gnosticism and in pagan Greek religious writings.[45]In John. 15:1, following the analysis of Bultmann, one will have to conclude that we are dealing with *Identifikationsformel.*

The frequency with which the personal pronouns ἐγώ "I", ἡμεῖς ˓We", σύ "YOU" (sg), ὑμεῖς "YOU" (pl) occur in John is a marked feature of Johannine style. Thus ἐγω is found 144x in John, as against 29x in Matthew, 17x in Mark and 23x in Luke. The ἐγὼ εἰμί formula with its majestic formula for the deity is also found in some Old Testament texts. "I am El Shaddai" (Genesis 17:1). Other important texts are Exodus 5:26; Ps. 35:3; Jeremiah 3:12; Isaiah 61:8. The same concept is found in Revelation though with some minor variations:

> I am the Alpha and the Omega (Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13)
> I am the First and the Last (Rev. 1:17)

There are some instances, when for the sake of emphasis, the ἐγὼ εἰμί is repeated: this is found especially in Deutero-Isaiah 51:12; 43:11, 13, 25; 48:15.

In an extra-biblical document, on the tombstone of Isis we read the following:

> "I am Isis, the queen of every land
> I am the eldest daughter of Cronos, the youngest god
> I am the wife and sister of Osiris
> I am the first that devised fruit for men

> I am the mother of Horus the King
> I am she that riseth in the dog-star."[46]

In sorcery an enchanter would try to identify himself with powerful and terrible deities in order to impress the demons he wanted to overcome. Here we have another "I" style for the deity.

> "I am the headless demon, having eyes in my feet, the strong one, the deathless fire
> I am the truth who hateth that evil deeds are in the world
> I am he that lighteneth and thundereth
> I am he whose sweat is a shower falling on the earth to make it fruitful
> I am he that begotteth and begetteth again
> I am the grace of aeon."[47]

It is clear that from biblical and extra biblical sources that ἐγὼ εἰμὶ is a formula for the deity. In the context of 15:1 Jesus is revealing himself; not just as a mere man making a self introduction. Here it is a formula for a deity, hence the theological importance of "I am the true vine." It is a Christological revelation, Hence Blank says:

> "Ich bin der wahre weinstock" muß daher zunächst als christologische Offenbarungs-Aussage verstanden werden.[48]

Also in the Synoptics the formula "I am" can be used by Anti-Christ in order to deceive others (Mark 13:6; Luke 21:8). All he needed to say was "I am."

> Dieses ἐγὼ εἰμί begegnet auch bei den Synoptikern, dort sogar so, daß in den Vorzeichen der Parusie sich ein falscher Christus einfachhin einführen kann durch das absolut gebrauchte ἐγὼ εἰμι.[49]

5.5.2 The True Vine

The adjective, true, is ἀληθινή *alethine*. There are other derivatives from the same root to designate "truth, the true" and Brown enumerates them as follows:

	Synoptics	John I-II-III	John	Revelation	Total Johannine	Total New Testament
ἀληθέια	7	25	20	—	45	109
ἀληθής	2	14	3	—	17	26
ἀληθίνος	1	9	4	10	23	28[50]

ἀληθίνος means "true, real, genuine, authentic." Brown says that it also implies exclusivity in the sense of "the only real" as opposed to "putative or would be"[51] or "imagined, unreal." Borig concurs and affirms that "true" carries with it the note of exclusivity.

> Wir erweitern damit die Bedeutung von ἀληθίνος · über die Aufgewiesene qualitative Bestimmung hinaus trägt es deutlich einen exklusiven Akzent.[52]

Special attention should be paid to these two words, ἡ αληθινή, because they are emphasized by being placed after the noun. Translated literally, the text, should read: "I am the vine, the true one." Jesus therefore says that he alone is the vine, the only true and authentic vine. In him all the qualities and attributes of a good vine are verified.

One sees close parallelism between this verse and some texts of John 6: "I am the living bread" (6:51) and especially 6:58.

> This is the living bread which came down from heaven:
> not such as the fathers ate and died:
> he who eats this bread will live forever."
> Confer also 4:23 and 6:32.

The true is opposed to κόσμος *kosmos* that pretends to offer real life but in reality offers nothing that has anything to do with life, making it look like vital energy, but thus deceiving man's longing for real life.[53]

In Jeremiah 2:21 we read: "Yet I planted you a choice vine." In the MT it is called שׂוֹרֵק כֻּלָּה זֶרַע אֱמֶת *soreq cullah zera' emeth* while the LXX translates it as ἐγὼ δὲ ἐφευτεσα σε ἄμπελον καρποφόρον πάσαν ἀληθινήν *ego de epheutesa se ampelon karpophoron pasan alethinen*—**I,** however, planted you a fruit bearing vine wholly authentic". Here we meet ἄμπελος ἀληθινή *ampelos alethine* ˹ true vine" which is distinct from degenerate and stinking grapes. Is Jeremiah dependent on Isa 5:2?

There is a minor variant. Tatian, Ef, Af and Cyril read ἀμπελῶν = vineyard. However in Koine Greek, the two terms vine and vineyard are used indiscriminately.

Jesus introduces himself with ἐγὼ εἰμὶ and proclaims himself the true vine. Here no attention is paid to the grapes or to wine or to any product of the vine but solely to the vine and its branches. The shoots are perfused with vital power from it, from the tree they receive their power to grow and bear fruit and the wither away if they are cut off from it.

Jesus is the true vine, the vine of royal stock, meeting all the expectations, and

does not become anything else in the process. By speaking of the true vine, the verse refers to the vine's positive purpose—fulfilling and fruit-bearing character.[54]But why did Jesus choose the vine for his teaching?

> "A vine has none of the dignity of the olive with its fine trunk and spreading branches.[55]

The olive was a familiar sight in Jerusalem as the "Mount of Olives" indicates. Though vines were plentiful in Judea, for strength and stateliness, they were much inferior to the olive. Hence Ezekiel says:

> How does the wood of the vine surpass any wood . . . ? Is the wood taken from it to make anything? Do men take a peg from it to hang any vessel on? Lo, it is given to the fire for fuel (Ezekiel 15:2–4a).

But Ezekiel also praised the vine planted by the water, whose strongest stem became a scepter towering aloft among the thick boughs, seen in its height with the mass of its branches (19:10–11).

The vine has had an unhappy history in OT theology especially when used figuratively of Israel. Israel was a *soreq* that produced stinking grapes (Isaiah 5:1–2). Israel was the true fine that became degenerate (Jeremiah 2:21). Israel was a luxuriant vine that will be overtaken by divine judgment (Hosea 10:1–15). Israel was a vine transplanted from Egypt but broken and now ravaged by wild beasts (Psalms 80:8–13). In the Old Testament whenever Israel was compared to the vine, there was invariably a lament over her degeneracy. Even in the New Testament, the vintage of the earth would be gathered and thrown into the wine press of God's anger (Rev 14:19).

Since, in the Old Testament, the vine represented Israel, would Christ be proclaiming himself the new Israel, but with nothing in common with the sins of Israel of old? Blank is of the opinion that Jesus was using of himself an imagery that was always used of Israel but radically different from it. Hence he goes on to say

> Diese Deutung, nach der das Jüdische Weinstock-Bild als Symbol für Israel nun auf Jesus übertragen wird, daß also Jesus an die Stelle des alten Israel tritt, entspricht auch der johanneischen Theologie am besten.[56]

Jesus did not use the OT imagery of Israel when speaking of himself. He used the term but radically changed its meaning just as he used the image of bread and wine to speak of his body and blood in Ch. 6 of John's gospel, but gave it radically a new meaning and interpretation.

5.5.3 My Father Is the Vine-Dresser

The Greek, γεώργος *georgos*, a "farmer," a "tiller of the earth," would hardly be a term that would aptly apply to the vineyard. γεώργος here would mean "one who tends the vine, a vine-dresser."

The term, γεώργος, occurs 19 times in the NT; 16 times in the parable of the wicked tenants, once in 2 Tim. 2:6, once in James 5:7, and of course in John 15:1. The special characteristic of this pericope is that Jesus is the vine while the vine-dresser is not a hired laborer who may work with varying zeal and dedication in the vineyard. The vine-dresser is the FATHER. In the Canticle of the Vine, the vineyard belongs to Yahweh Sebaoth. In other OT texts, the owner is undoubtedly Yahweh. In Ps. 80, it was Yahweh who brought the vine out of Egypt, planted it and made it fill the land. Here Yahweh is not called the owner: he is the vine-dresser.

Van den Bussche thinks that the Father is mentioned here not so much as to stimulate confidence in his paternal solicitude as to guarantee the authenticity of the vine.[57] Hoskyns thinks differently: the Father is the owner of the vine and the prime agent in the care and production of fruit.[58]

The Father is now included in this figurative discourse, not after secondary consideration, but as a key figure in the life and activity of the vine. His activity leads to bearing fruit. By calling God his Father and assigning to him the role of the vine-dresser, Jesus declares that his existence is grounded on his existence from God. Jesus is the vine living and growing and in the Father's cultivation. The Father cares for the vine, gives it what it needs to thrive and his care is long, lasting, and uninterrupted.[59] Hence the Father cares for the vine with heavenly solicitude and cares for the genuineness and abundance of its fruit.

v. 2 πᾶν κλῆμα = every branch. κλῆμα *klema* is found four times in the New Testament and only in John 15; vv. 2, 4, 5, 6. In the LXX it is habitually used for the "shoot" of the vine (Numbers 13:24; Ezekiel 17:6) as distinct from κλάδος *klados*, which is the branch of other trees. Κλαδος is the smaller branch of any tree (Matt 13:32; 21:8; Mark 4:32; 13:28; Luke 13:9, Rom 11:16–21).

It is necessary that the branch that Jesus is speaking about remains in him. "In me", ἐν ἐμοὶ *en emoi is* the key word and is repeated six times between vv. 2–6. John does not say that any branch anywhere will be cut off. Rather the branch in the vine which is Jesus, that does not bear fruit, will be cut away. Hence one cannot be in Jesus and not bear fruit. The emphasis is "in me."

Every branch: the adjective πᾶν *pan* does not admit any exceptions. Its position at the beginning of the sentence stresses its importance. Hence every branch which does not bear fruit, my Father cuts away, αἴρει *airei;* but every fruit-bearing branch he prunes, καθαίρει *kathairei*.

The Father's activity is expressed paranomastically by these two verbs αἴρει

and καθαίρει· they have the same assonance. The play on words is most probably intentional. καθαιρειν means freeing from excrescences and useless shoots which are a drain on the branch. καθαιρειν is more a ritualistic term and not the most suitable verb for "pruning" which is the obvious meaning in the context. ἄἳρει means "to take away, cut away." Hence Brown concludes:

> So it would seem that both verbs were chosen not because of their suitability for describing vineyard practices but for their applicability to Jesus and his followers.[60]

The vine-dresser ensures that the vine produces much fruit by two activities. In winter, he cuts away all the dry and withered branches. These are gathered and used for fire. This is done so that new and vigorous branches may grow. In spring, he trims the young branches that are not likely to bear fruit. This makes the other branches sturdy. Those branches, which left to themselves would not be able to bear fruit, but nevertheless would take nourishment from the vine, Lagrange calls "les gourmands, qui absorbaient la séve au detriment de bonnes branches."[61] In the first instance they are cut away, in the second they are trimmed.

Although καθαιρειν is not commonly used either for agriculture or viticulture, it is nevertheless found in classical Greek, especially with reference to the growth of the vine. Xenophon in Oeconomicus xx,20 says:

> In fact, between good work and dishonest slothfulness there is as wide a difference as between actual work and actual idleness. Suppose the vines are being hoed to clear the ground of weeds; if the hoeing is badly done that the weeds grow ranker and more abundant, how can you call that anything but idleness.
>
> Ὅταν σπαπτόντων, ἵ να ὕλης καθαιραι
> ἀι ἄμπελοι γενωνται, οὕτω σκαπτώσιν,
> ὥστε πλείω και καλλίω τῆν γιγνεσθαι.[62]

Cutting away some branches or even the destruction of the vine is not unknown in the Bible. In Jeremiah 5:10 we read:

> Go through the vine rows and destroy
> make indeed a full-end
> strip away her branches
> for they belong not to Yahweh
> (Translation: mine)

In John, any branch not producing fruit is already dead. The trimming is not some punishment for non-bearing branches. If the branch does not bear fruit, it is worthless and fit for the oven. In Johannine dualism there is no intermediary between light and darkness, life and death. Hence either a branch is alive and productive or unproductive and dead. Hence the fig tree full of leaves but without fruit may appear to be alive (even though it was not the season for figs) was cursed because it had no fruit. Concretely it was dead. Though this narrative is found outside Johannine tradition (Mark 11:12–14; 20–24 // Matthew 21:18–19) it brings out the need to bear fruit on all seasons. To bear fruit is to be alive, not to produce fruit is to die.

In the work of salvation, the role of the Father is of paramount importance, so important that Jesus says: "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13). The Father's activity is not once for all; it is continuous: "My Father is working still and so am I" (John 5:17). Speaking about watchful care over his vineyard Yahweh says

> That day, sing of the delightful vineyard!
> I, Yahweh, am its keeper;
> every moment I water it
> for fear its leaves should fall
> night and day I watch over it
>
> I am angry no longer
> If thorns and briers come
> I will fight against them
> I will burn every one of them (Isaiah 27:2–4)

The vine proves it is genuine by bearing rich and lasting fruit, and for this needs the perfect vine-dresser. Bearing fruit is a dominant theme of the discourse (vv. 4–5). The Father is mentioned again in v. 8 where he is glorified in Christ's disciples by their bearing much fruit.

However, one must distinguish between bearing fruit and remaining in Jesus. Abiding in Jesus has a deeper meaning than bearing fruit, even though bearing fruit is one of the effects of remaining in Jesus. "Abiding" means partaking of the very life of Jesus himself.

The cutting off of dead and non-bearing fruit branches should not be understood as referring either to Judas or to some apostate members of the early Church. As said earlier, it does not seem that the discourse is polemic. Jesus is reiterating concrete praxes in viticulture which are well known. These principles and praxes, when applied to his followers, are valid for all times for every non fruit bearing branch is cut off and burnt.

> Damit wird das Fruchtbringen zum entscheidenden Moment für das Dasein der Rebe: bringt sie keine Frucht, ist ihr Schicksaal besiegelt, und sie wird entfernt.[63]

The purpose for the cutting and the pruning of the vine is that it may bear more fruit. Bearing fruit is repeated in vv. 2, 4, 5, 8, 16. How is this fruit to be understood? Van den Bussche gives the answer: he believes it has more to do with fecundity in the service of the gospel than with personal sanctification.

> . . . Le fruit abundant vise moins la sanctification personelle que la fecundité au service de l'Evangile.[64]

v.3 Here the figurative speech is interrupted for Jesus is now addressing only his disciples. Without this verse the text would flow better. Schnackenburg thinks that the verse could be a reflection on John 13:10b.[65] Jesus declares the disciples clean, a word which besides here, occurs in John only in 13:10 and 11. In 13:10 the primary meaning is bodily cleanliness, which however does not exclude the spiritual. This is a follow up on v. 2 which speaks of the branches that are pruned.

The disciples are already clean: they are not the useless, barren, dead branches. Now he tells them the source of their cleanliness. The disciples are clean διὰ τόν λόγον; on account of the word. διὰ *dia* with the accusative (John 6:57) can mean "for the sake of, thanks to" and is to be distinguished from διὰ with the genitive which would indicate, "an instrument."[66]

> The text here is not with the genitive which would suggest that the Word of Jesus is the instrument of cleansing rather it is because of the Word abiding in them that they are kept pure.[67]

Hence it is the word that cleanses and purifies. The word is personified.

The word that purifies is λόγος, *logos*. λόγος is to be distinguished from ῥῆμα *rhema* (15:7; 17:18) which emphasizes the actual words of Jesus whereas λόγος is the sum total of *teaching* and *actions* of Jesus. λόγος is not the *ipsissima verba*. The λόγος of Jesus is active and sometimes personified: it judges people; ὁλόγος ὅν ἐλά λησα, ἐκεῖνος κρινεῖ αὐτὸν *ho logos hon elalesa, ekeinos krinei auton* it is the word which I have spoken that will judge him" (12:48). It is spirit and life (6:63).

The word which is in them and which they have assimilated (5:38; 8:43) is the totality of the message and instruction of Jesus. It includes not only words but also deeds. In so far as these instructions have made their home in the disciples, they are clean.

Hoskyns says that there is a double element in the purification of the disciples: the initial purgation wrought by the words of Jesus in the Upper Room where they

were declared and symbolized in 13:1–11, and the conservation of this purification through permanent union with him. The retention of this cleansing is a task for the future.[68]

Our text is not inconsistent with 13:10, 11 for in Chapters 13 and 15 John speaks of what Jesus meant and did for his own. In Chapter 13, the washing of the feet represents his loving service which culminated in his death: in Chapter 15, however, he asks his own to remain in him to bear abundant fruit. The disciples are clean (13:10) and they are clean through Christ's word, because keeping the words of Jesus is the prerequisite for the Father and the Son remaining in them (14:23). In Chapter 15, they have to remain in him and become his disciples.

Though the Father cuts off some branches and prunes others, the text does not say that he performs this exercise on the disciples. They are clean already. There is some distinction in the roles of the Father and of Jesus. The Father cuts away and trims the branches; Jesus remains in the disciples and both activities have the same result: they bear abundant fruit. Since the disciples have been cleansed, all they need to do is to remain in Jesus.

The word that purifies is the word that Jesus spoke—λελάληκα *lelakeka*—to them. λαλειν *lalein* is different from ἐπεῖν, *epein* for λάλειν has the nuance of revelation. It is the revelatory teachings and instructions that cleanses and purifies. Hence Van den Bussche says:

> On affirme enfin, de façon formelle, que les disciples ont reçu déjà la purete essentielle en meme temps que la Parole, c'est-a-dire par la revelation faite en Jesus (John. 13:10). La parole est donc tout à la fois le principe de nouvelles purifications, et la source permanente de la vitalité chretienne.[69]

v. 4 *Remain in me and I in you:* "Remain in me" stands at the beginning and end of this verse, thereby making it a small but complete unit by itself and forming a literary inclusion. Between vv. 4–10 "remain in me" occurs ten times.

"Remain in me and I in you" has been used earlier in Johannine tradition. In 6:56 we read. . . . ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει, κἀγὼ ἐν αὐτῷ *en emoi menei, kago en auto menei* "he who eats my flesh. . . . remains in me and I in him" but the promise was not turned into a precept until here.

The verb "remain" μείνατε *meinate* is aor. imptv and this form of the verb occurs in John as more authoritative than the present imptv which may denote continuous action; cf 5:7, 8; 6:10; 7:24; 9:7; 11:39; 12:27; 13:27; 15:9; 21:10.[70]

> Das Joh hier wie oft den Imperativ Aorist gebraucht, gibt der Mahnung noch mehr Gewícht, indem er sie auf den jeweíls vollzug dieser Haltung richtet.[71]

The motif "remaining in" is characteristic of he Fourth Gospel and occurs here with greater emphasis than elsewhere. Probably this can be explained by the farewell context in which Jesus is urging his disciples to remain faithful to him.

In the sentence "Remain in me and I in you" we note that the second part has no verb—it is supplied. This sentence can be understood in three different ways:

- "Remain in me AS I remain in you." Kai would be understood as a comparison.
- "IF you remain in me, I remain I you." "Remain in me" would be the protasis, " and I in you" would be the apodosis. It would be conditional.
- "Remain in me WHILE I remain in you." The two clauses are balanced. It would mean: "Let there be mutual indwelling."

Ad i. There cannot be any basis of comparison between the life and activity of Jesus with that of the disciple. Jesus can act in the disciple, but how can the disciple REALLY act on Jesus?

Ad ii. The conditional abiding cannot be supported by Greek grammar for the verb is imptv. It must be admitted that it makes perfect reading but it woefully falls short of the depth of Johannine theology. The abiding of the disciple in Jesus is not a condition for Jesus abiding in him.

Ad. iii The syntax would be strange as it would change the aor. imptv into a hortatory subjunctive.

It does appear that the most plausible interpretation would be that these two clauses are integrally bound together. Being in Jesus is not static and the result is bearing fruit. Jesus not only wants but commands union with him. By so doing they become his disciples.

> Remaining in Jesus and having Jesus remain in the disciple are parts of a whole, for there is only personal relationship between Jesus and his disciples.[72]

The metaphorical use of this imagery can be seen in the deeper significance of "εν," i.e. of the disciples being in Jesus. It has a greater meaning than that of a branch being attached to the vine. This is highlighted by "You in me and I in you." The branches can be attached to the stem but can the stem be attached to the branches? This alone draws attention to the degree and manner of the indwelling. Schnackenburg calls it "reciprocal immanence formula."[73]

John is talking about organic growth, internal growth, driven by the pulsating life of the vine in the branch. The branch is given the responsibility of remaining in the vine which means continuous dependence, reliance, and persistent imbibing of the life of the vine. This is not growth by external accretion. Life that is not impelled by life within brings forth dead crystals not fruit.[74]

Without this reciprocal remaining in him and him in them, they will fall back on themselves either in total unfruitfulness or lapsing into the wild growth that is no longer shaped by his word, into activism or idealism that is neither derived nor directed to him.[75] There is no abiding in Jesus without bearing fruit nor is there any bearing fruit without abiding in him.

The vocabulary "fruit" or "bearing fruit" is not typically Johannine. "Fruit" is found only eight times in the Gospel out of which six times in 15:2–16: the other two instances are 4:36 and 12:24. It is not found in the letters of John and four times in Revelation. However, it is a dominant theme in the discourse on the vine.

v. 5 The verse begins once again with the solemn I AM formula and repeats v. 1 without the adjective "true." The theme of Jesus' teaching in this verse is to "remain in me." V. 5 repeats v. 4 but in a more concise, pungent style.

> L'idee du v. 4 est reprisé avec une expression positive et affirmative, fortifiée par la forme negative à laquelle se rattache la conclusion; χωρὶς ἐμοῦ.[76]

The thrust of the argument is that Jesus is the vine and the disciples are the branches. Remaining in Jesus, the disciple bears abundant fruit but apart from him he accomplishes nothing.A disciple would be a complete failure if he bore no fruit and would be cast away. Hence Blank says:

> Wer nicht in Jesu bleibt und ohne ihn leben und wirken will, der wird hinausgeworfen (cfr. Matthew 5:13; 21:39).[77]

Hence v. 5 is not mere repetition of v. 4: it makes the admonition to abide in Jesus more insistent and gives it a deeper foundation. Above all, it creates the intimate nexus between remaining in Jesus and bearing fruit which is a constitutive element in discipleship.

This argument is reinforced by the double negative: χωρὶς ἐμοῦ οὐ δύνασθε ποεῖν οὐδέν *choris emou ou dunasthe poien ouden* ⌜without me you can do nothing". It corresponds to χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ *choris autou egeneto oude* "without him was not anything that was made" of the Prologue 1:3. It demonstrates the radical incapability of the disciple to operate without Jesus. This is fundamental to any disciple if he is to understand himself and his activity not only in relation to Jesus but to everything else. Without Jesus the disciple can do absolutely NOTHING. St. Augustine summarizes this succinctly:

> Ne quisquam putaret saltem parvum aliquem fructum posse a semetipso palmitem ferre, cum dixisset "hic fert fructum multum," non ait, quia sine me parum potestis facere; sed "nihil potestis facere." Sive ergo

> parum, sive multum, sine illo fieri non potest, sine quo nihil fieri potest. In Jo Tractactus LXXX.3 PL 35:1842

The translation follows:

> That no one might think that a branch can bear at least some little fruit of itself, when he had said: "This one bears much fruit", he did not say, "For without me you can do a little", but "You can do nothing". Whether a little, therefore, or much, it cannot be done without whom nothing can be done.

Blank also adds that only in union with Jesus does the promise of "much fruit" hold good for apart from him is absolute fruitlessness.

> Nur die Verbundenheit mit Jesus hat die Verheißung "reicher Frucht" dagegen bedeutet die Trennung von ihm ebenso radikale Fruchtlösigkeit.[78]

This is confirmed by the post resurrection story of fishing by some of the disciples. Peter, John, and a few others go fishing and despite their expertise and experience, they catch nothing. But at Jesus' word, they net 153 large fish, and even with this number, their net did not break (John 21:1–11).

v. 6 The main thoughts of vv. 1–4 are repeated in vv. 5–6 without "the gardener"(v.1) and "the pruning" (v.2). The realities are set down in a language that does not care for style or embellishment. Remaining in Jesus means bearing fruit and consequently life: not remaining in Jesus is doom and utter destruction.

There is a sequence of five verbs in v. 6 in quick succession which dramatizes the scene and tells the awful story of what befalls the branch that does not remain in the vine. Such a branch is (a) cut off (b) dries up (c) is collected (d), thrown into the fire (e) and is burnt. No opportunity is given for a farmer to hoe around it, to manure it and give it a second chance as in Luke 13:6–9. Its destruction is final and irreversible. Nothing would be left to recall its existence. Verse 6 is a threat, and a threat that will take place inexorably given the circumstances.

There is a sudden change in the language and style of the speaker. The language is uncompromising with its absolute imperatives. No concessions are given, no excuses accepted, no allowances made. The only redeeming factor is that both the promise and the threat apply. Any branch that does not remain in the vine is doomed: it will face maximum penalty: it will be destroyed and burnt; whereas remaining in him, one is blest with abundant fruit.

The combination of tenses in v. 6 creates some problems. "If anyone does not remain ((μενῃ *mene*—present subjunctive), he is like the branch that is thrown away

(ἐβλήθη *eblethe*□aor. passive), it withers (ἐξηράνθη *exeranthe*—aor. passive), they collect it (συνάγουσιν *synagousin*—present indicative), they throw it into the fire (βάλλουσιν *ballousin*—present indicative) and it burns (καίεται *kaietai*—passive present). In one sentence this is an agglomeration of the present subjunctive, aor. passive, present indicative and passive present.

The construction and the tenses change but not the meaning. The third person plural active is sometimes used for the passive in a manner that recalls Hebrew and Aramaic occasional preferences for the third person active for the passive, e.g. Luke 12:20; John 20:2.[79] Hence "they collect it // it is collected; they throw it // it is thrown into fire."

The verb ἐξηράνθη does not occur again in John. It is found in Mark 4:6, "used of the withering seed that has no root." In this verse, the vine shoot has no "root" in the vine; it is no longer in the vine, hence it withers.

We have two verbs in the aor., ἐβλήθη and ἐξηράνθη. How should these aorists be understood especially as aorists indicate *actio unica*?" The answer is necessary for on it depends the exegesis of this verse. Here are some possible explanations.

- Translated as the aorist one could read: "If anyone does not remain in me (present), *he has been thrown away* (aor.), and has withered (aor.). The reason why the branch does not remain in the tree is that is that it has been rejected already.
- Some understand the aorists either as gnomic (used in axioms and proverbs for stating a generally accepted principle) or as proleptic (treating as past what takes place in the future).[80]

  Barrett says that these are "timeless aorists."[81]
- Carson believes that the choice of the aorist is consequent on the idea of completeness of action which the speaker wants to relay. The branch that does not remain in the vine is thrown away and withers: the judgment is complete and decisive.[82]

We would prefer to say that the aorist is gnomic. It is common knowledge that the branch that does not remain in the vine is cut off, it withers and so becomes fuel for fire.

The burning of the withered branch should not be considered as a mere figure of speech. It indicates the lot that awaits anyone who does not remain in the vine. Like the prince of this world, he will be cast away (12:31). Matthew teaches that such people are cast into exterior darkness where there be weeping and gnashing of teeth (8:12; 2:13; 25:30).

The branches that do not remain in the vine are cast into fire. Fire symbolizes judgment and punishment (Gen 19:24; Lev 10:2). One should not think of *gehenna*

(Mark 9:43–47) for *gehenna* does not feature in John's thought pattern. Not remaining in the vine is consummate destruction.

Divine severity in dealing with agents that do not bear fruit is found in many texts of the New Testament. In Matthew we read that salt that is no longer savory is thrown own and trodden underfoot by men (5:13); the darnel is burnt in fire (13:30; 40–42;) a limb that causes one to sin is cut off and thrown into fire (18:8, 9). Paul in Romans 11:22 says:

> Note, then, the kindness and severity of God: severity towards those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off.

There is a contrast between those who are cast away and those who are not.

> All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out (John 6:37).

St. Augustine summarizes this verse beautifully:

> Unum de duobus palmiti congruit, aut vitis aut ignis; si in vite non est, in igne erit; ut ergo in igne non sit, in vite sit. (In Jo Tractatus LXXXI 3, PL 35:1842) The translation reads thus:
>
> One of two things is suitable for the branch, either the vine or the fire; if it is not in the vine, it will be in the fire. Therefore, that it may not be in the fire, let it be in the vine.

The useless branch is thrown into *the fire*—εἰς τὸ πῦρ *eis to pyr*—with the definite article. Why should "fire" have the definite article? The tree that does not bear fruit is thrown into fire—εἰς πῦρ *eis pyr*□without the definite article (Matt 3:10). Which fire could the evangelist be referring to?

As was said earlier, it is probably not gehenna. Wescott thinks that it could be the fire in the Wadi Kidron where the vine prunings were burnt.[83] Probably it can be explained by the frequent use of the definite article in parabolic narratives.

John leaves the image of the vine and its branches and returns to the theme of "abiding in Jesus." The one idea that John has repeatedly accentuated is that the disciple should bear fruit. To bearing fruit, John adds the gift of efficacious prayer: all his petitions will be granted, and these are some of the blessings of remaining in the vine.

This is a departure from the Synoptic tradition where faith is the prerequisite for prayers to be answered.

> Therefore I say to you, whatever you ask in prayer, *believe* that you will receive it and it will be yours (Mark 11:24).

"All things are possible to him who *believes*" (Mark 9:23). If the disciples had faith as small as a mustard seed, they could command the sycamore tree to be rooted up and planted in the sea and it would obey (Luke 17:6). Faith in Jesus is more than belief in his teachings or fitful attraction to his Person; it is continual abiding "in Him."[84]

This verse has a minor critical problem. Most mss read αἰτήσασθε *aitesasthe* aor. imptv. middle of the verb αἰτέω *aiteo*. A few mss like Ta a sysp read the future αιτήσασθαι *aitesasthai*. The future can be explained by the influence of the next verb γενήσεται *genesestai*—fut. With most mss we keep the aor. imptv αἰτήσασθε.

Verse 7 has a few peculiarities. The threat of v. 6 is followed by a promise in v. 7. Vv. 5b-6 is in the third person, possibly to stress the fundamental character of the statement: v. 7 is a return to the second person.

Lagrange worries about the placement of this verse. He believes that the text would have flowed better if v. 7 were considered out of place. It would then be a sort of parenthesis which recalls Mark 11:24 more than John 14:13, 14 where in Mark the accent is praying in the name of Jesus, a phrase absent in John 15:7. Lagrange concludes by saying that the disciples, terrified at the prospect of eternal loss, received from Jesus a practical solution to the mystery of salvation: recourse to prayer.[85]

There is no doubt that v. 7 could create the impression of an after-thought, but that is not the only perspective from which the verse can be studied. The verse narrates one of the many joys and blessings of remaining in Jesus. The assurance that ALL prayers, no matter what, will be answered, is cause for great rejoicing especially to the disconsolate disciples. This assurance is found in John 14:13 and consequently integral to the teachings of the Farewell Discourse. Moreover there is no MSS that has a different arrangement. Hence the text should be left as it is especially as it is authentic Johannine theology and makes perfect sense in the context.

The text begins with ἐὰν μείνητε *ean meinete* ⌜if you remain" which is followed by a variation of the immanence formula—καὶ τὰ ῥήματά μοῦ ἐν ὑμὶν μεινῃ *kai ta rhemata mou en hymin meine* ⌜and my words remain in you"—instead of the usual κἀγὼ ἐν ὑμῖν *kago en hymin* "and I in you". The use of ῥήματα *rhemata* which seems to refer to 14:10, insist on the words of Jesus making their home in the disciple.

Lagrange says that if the disciple remains in Jesus, and Jesus' words remain in him, this is not a mere explanation of the first formula, because there exists now a new condition instead of simple reciprocity,

> car il y a une nouvelle condition au lieu d'une simple reciprocité.[86]

It can be presumed that anyone who believes in Jesus, keeps his words; but v. 2 warns about the branches in the vine that do not bear fruit.

The assurance that the petitions of the disciples will be granted is stated more freely and more boldly here than elsewhere. Jesus promises: ὃ ἐὰν θέλητε *ho ean thelete* ⌜whatsoever you may wish." No seal is placed and no exception is made. A blank cheque is given to the disciples: but why?

It is from the situation of immanence that certainty that prayer will be heard comes. With Jesus dwelling in the disciple and his words dwelling in him, the disciple cannot pray but like a disciple; he can only but possess the mind of Jesus (Phil 2: 5). Petitions prompted by the indwelling words of Jesus cannot fail to be in harmony with Divine Will. It is a boon not granted arbitrarily but as an inevitable consequence of immanence.

The text does not say who will grant the request; the Father or Jesus. Schnackenburg thinks it is the Father and argues from the fact that the Father is mentioned in v. 8.[87] But from the context and especially with the use of the passive voice, it could be either Jesus or the Father. This, however, does not make any significant difference—the prayer of the true disciple will always be heard.

v. 8 ἐν τούτῳ *en touto* "in this." It is the disciples' abiding in Jesus and Jesus' words abiding in them that is the foundation for the following: the glorification of the Father, bearing much fruit, evidence of being the disciples of Jesus.

"My Father is glorified." ἐδοξάσθη *edoxasthe* is the aor. which can be understood either as gnomic—"the Father is always glorified"—or proleptic—"the Father will have been glorified." Both interpretations are possible. John speaks more usually of the glorification of the Son (19 times) than of the glorification of the Father (9 times). The Father glorifies his Son (13:32–33) and the Son glorifies the Father (17:4). The Father is glorified in the Son when the Son, by his obedience, accomplishes perfectly the will of the Father.

> I have glorified you on earth, and finished the work you gave me to do (17:4).

Now the Father is also glorified in the work of the believers who remain in Jesus. With this glorification, the picture is complete. The disciples will glorify the Father by continuously bearing fruit in plenty.

It is possible to emphasize the aorist—the once-for-all dimension of the verb. The Father is glorified in the Son and the disciples united with Jesus glorify the Father in the one only act of glorification. This will then highlight and emphasize the importance and the effect of remaining in Jesus.

The γεώργος ⌜farmer" is always glorified if the trees of his planting are fruitful. Trito-Isaiah says:

> Those who mourn in Zion, to whom the message of comfort is sent will be called terebinths of integrity, planted by Yahweh to glorify him (61:3).

The Father is glorified because he is the vine-dresser, intent on abundant yield.

The Father's activity and that of the disciples came together in the production of fruit and Jesus as the "vine" is the "place" where this is made possible.[88]

> The Father prunes the branches and the disciples who remain in Jesus produce fruit. The Son is intent only on the glorification of the Father (13:31–32; 14:13; 17:1) and after his return to the Father makes use of the disciples for the same purpose.

5.5.4 Becoming Disciples of Jesus

καὶ γενήσεσθε ἐμοὶ μαθηταί *kai genesesthe emoi mathetai* There is a variant: the following p^{66} D **B** L θ it vg sah read γενήσθε *genesthe*. Carson calls the variant "one of the most difficult in the entire Gospel of John."[139] γενήσεσθη is the future indicative and the translation would be: "in this is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit and you will be my disciple." The variant, γενήσθε, is the aor. subjunctive giving the meaning "that you may bear much fruit and become my disciple." This latter version would be dependent on ἵνα *hina* and would be parallel to φέρητε *pherete*. Carson proposes this translation: "Bearing fruit is to my Father's glory and thus you will be my disciples," and concludes:

> Fruit bearing is so bound up with genuine discipleship that one stands by metonomy for the other.[90]

It does appear that γενήσεσθε should be preferred, working on the axiom *lectio difficilior praeferenda est*. Moreover it is easy to see how γενησθε could be introduced because it would be parallel to φέρητε.

One would, however, believe that Jesus was addressing those who were already his disciples. Hence in either case "will become" or "may become" does not make an easy reading.

It does appear that the text should be understood: thus "Bearing much fruit" and "becoming my disciples" are not two different actions, one consequent on the other. It does not mean that when they bear fruit, then they become his disciples: rather it is in their bearing fruit that they demonstrate and prove apodictically that they are disciples.

However there is not much difference in meaning between the two readings, because both insist on bearing fruit and on being the disciples of Jesus. Discipleship is not static but dynamic. It is growing and bringing to maturity the new life received from Jesus. The true disciple is always becoming more fully a disciple.[91]

Translating the text literally one would read: ". . . . and become disciples to me." This expresses the relationship more affectionately and more intimately. It indicates a more thorough possession; the disciple now becomes a personal possession of Jesus. The immanence is now perfect and the fruits can be seen. There is no abiding in Jesus without bearing fruit nor is there any bearing fruit without abiding in him.[92]

The disciples bear fruit when they make known to others the glory of the Father manifested in the Son: not only because they have seen his glory (1:14; 13:31), but above all because they continue the salvific work of the Father realized in the Son (14:13; 16:14; 17:22).

> Ce serait affaiblir le texte johannique que de ramener cette glorification à la reconnaissance de la gloire divine par les hommes don't il est question dans MATT 5,16.[93]

No limit is set to the work of glorification and of bearing fruit. The Father is the beginning of the work; the Son is the end of the entire salvation history.

The authentic disciple carries in himself such divine energy which cannot be held back but must of necessity reach out irresistibly to others. That is how the disciple not only bears fruit but bears it in plenty and such divine energy is incontrovertible evidence that this is the handiwork of God.

In Johannine theology, to "be a disciple" and "to remain in Jesus" are basically the same and complement each other. The active and total dependence of the disciple on the Son is the glorification of the Father. The result is the abundance of fruit. Fruitfulness is the joy and the glory of the vine-dresser. Fruitlessness is threatened by fire since it does not glorify God.

5.5.5 My Father

This verse forms an inclusion with v. 1 where the Father is called the vine-dresser. The Father cuts and trims the vine: the vine produces more fruit. That work is continued in the Son by the disciples.

With this John comes to the end of his parabolic discourse on the vine which differs *toto caelo* from the Old Testament images. In the Old Testament, Israel was the vine, here Jesus is the vine. The vine in the Old Testament either did not bear fruit or yielded stinking grapes; here the vine bears fruit abundantly and makes sure that the branches remain in the vine and both bear fruit.

The climax of the Old Testament image of the vine is found here, and it surpasses infinitely all the Old Testament expectations about the vine. The vine, once a figure, now becomes a reality. The vine often unfruitful bears fruit not only on the stem but also in the branches. The purpose of the vine is fulfilled—the vine is Jesus.

CHAPTER SIX

Israel as Vine

The understanding and use of the vine in Holy Writ differs significantly as one reads the historical, the didactic, and the prophetical books of the Old Testament. In the historical books, the vine is used to designate:

- One of the three royal plants of Israel (Judg 9:7–15)
- The richness and the fruitfulness of the land of Canaan (Numb 13:23)
- Divine benevolence (Deut 32:14)
- Support given the orphans, widows and aliens especially at harvest time (Lev 25:5)
- The bounty of Messsianic times (Gen 49:11)
- Sign of prosperity and peace: everyone sitting under his vine and fig tree (1 Kg 4:25)

In the didactic books, the use of the vine is not frequent but is nevertheless found to designate:

- The wife of a truly blessed man (Ps 128:3–4)
- The bride in the Song of Songs (7:8)
- The wicked who will disappear like the vine stripped of unripe grapes (Job 15: 33)
- For Israel (Ps 80:8–16)

It is mainly in the writings of the prophets that the vine is used as a symbol for Israel, and this presupposes what has been said of the vine especially in the historical books. We restrict ourselves to the study of the vine as representing Israel in Hosea 10:1–2, Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 15:1–7, and Ezekiel 17:1–8.

6.1 Hosea 10:1–2

Israel is a luxuriant vine
that yields abundant fruit.
The more its fruit increased,
the more altars it built;
as its country improved,
it improved its pillars.

Their heart is slippery;
now they must bear their guilt.
Yahweh will break down their altars,
and destroy their pillars.

This unit is part of a larger pericope (10:1–8) and our unit cannot be understood unless as part of the pericope. It begins with a positive statement about Israel, and especially about her past. The prophet calls her "Israel" not "Ephraim:" therefore speaking about the past of the entire people of God. He reminisces her history, her prosperity, her days of bounty and divine protection which she enjoyed since settlement in Canaan.

The unit is about Israel viewed as a luxuriant vine. The gift of the land, its prosperity and other divine munificences are blessings from Yahweh and received by Israel as such. Hence fruitfulness, development, cult, priesthood, and kingship are among the very many gifts given to Israel to enable her respond to the covenant. Consequently, the approving note on which the unit begins only helps to highlight the tragedy that will befall Israel when she eventually falls.

But the pericope 10:1–8 does not say that Israel acknowledged these gifts, nor does it deny it either. Neither does our text say that Israel ate to her satiety and forgot Yahweh (13:6). Hosea was consistent in asserting that Yahweh lavishly provided for Israel (2:10a; 11:2–4). Israel was particularly prosperous in the reign of Jeroboam II (783–743) which can be styled "the second golden age of Israel."

Israel interpreted her prosperity religiously: in it she saw the hand of God, though her gratitude was not necessarily expressed according to the terms of the covenant. The more prosperous she grew, the more she multiplied her altars and sacred pillars מַצֵּבוֹת: *masseboth* and the more she indulged in syncretistic cult. Her prosperity was exhibited in grandiose worship and more embellished and decorated sacred pillars.

Israel had with time bought the Canaanite concept of the deity as an amoral god; one who did not care for the moral code but was quite content with sacrifices and

cultic acts at the prescribed times. A guarantee that there would be no end to the deity's munificence was in innumerable and interminable cultic acts.

The sacred pillars מצבות *maṣṣēbôth* were forbidden by the law (Exod 23:24; 34: 13; Deut 12:3) but with inroad of Canaanite practices into Israel's religion, sacred pillars found their way into Israel's worship. Probably they represented a deity, a dead ancestor,[1] or fertility rites.[2] Israel used them also as memorials and commemorative steles (Gen 31:13; 35:20; Josh 24:26–27).

In our unit, i.e. 10:1–2, it is amazing how quickly the prophet changed his attitude towards Israel. Introduced as a luxuriant vine yielding abundant fruit (10:1a), the prophet follows it immediately with severe criticism of Israel's cult (10:16). The more Israel grew in prosperity, the more altars it fashioned. Hosea did not view those acts of worship as pleasing to God. Were those cultic practices believed to be occasions for obtaining more material gains from the deity?

A very important question comes up for discussion: Why was Yahweh displeased with Israel? Hosea answers it in v. 2. their hearts were not faithful to Yahweh: they were false; they were slippery. They uttered false words, swore false oaths, engaged in unlawful alliances, worshipped the calf at Beth Aven/Bethel; which calf eventually would be carried off as a trophy to the Assyrian king (10:4–9).

Hosea singled out Bethel for condemnation. He derisively called it Beth-Aven (House of Evil) or simply Aven (10:8). At Bethel Yahweh was worshipped under the symbol of a calf (1 Kgs 12:28–33). The prophets had long condemned that prestigious sanctuary (1 Kgs 13:1–10; Amos 3:14–15) and Hosea had predicted that the calf of Samaria would be broken (Hos 8:4–7).

For Hosea the sin of Israel was that she was worshipping Yahweh with a divided heart, serving Yahweh and Baal. The absence of a dominating unifying will to serve God resulted in worship preserved for other objectives which renders those acts futile, self-defeating, and finally unacceptable to God.[3]

Numerous altars and sacred pillars were built because Israel had learnt to call on Yahweh in her moment of need and to her material advantage (Hos 2:7; 16) even though her life was not Yahweh orientated. She did not seek to discover the will of God, but rather sought opportunities to take her destiny into her hands; independently of Yahweh. She sought pleasure from cultic celebrations (Hos 4:13–14; 8: 11–13) but without metanoia (Hos 2:1–8). Besides insincerity in cult, social injustice was unrestrained (Hos 4:1–3; 6:7; 6:7–7:2). The resultant effect was that a major catastrophe would overtake Israel, so disastrous that people would say to the mountains on which they worshiped "cover us" and to the hills on which they sacrificed "cover us" (Hos 10:8). Yahweh would then tear down the altars and destroy the sacred pillars (10:3).

Israel received blessings from Yahweh but gave glory and thanks to Baal. Hence we read:

I will lay waste her vines and fig trees
of which she said,
"These are my hire
which my lovers have given me" (2:12).

Indulging in syncretistic cult, Israel interpreted her affluence as divine approval which deserved more altars and more sacred pillars. The moral depravity of Israel was condemned repeatedly by Amos, especially when he recounted the social ills of Israel—unjust laws, exploitation of the poor and the powerless, reduction of people into slavery (Amos 8:4–8; 4:1–3), and acts which readily recalled the Egyptian bondage.

One of Israel's great tragedies was her complacency. Misinterpreting affluence for divine approval, Israel no longer listened to the voices of the prophets, especially to Amos and Hosea. Obstinacy, impenitence, mockery of the word of God (9:7–9) would lead to Israel's eventual destruction. This was divine verdict which would be executed in due time.

The idolatrous altars would be torn down, the high places destroyed to be overgrown with thistles and brambles and the sanctuaries would no longer prove to be places of refuge (10:8; 13–15).

This is a story of unfaithful Israel who though blessed by Yahweh was not loyal to the covenant. The dominance of syncretistic cult was in diametrical opposition to absolute and uncompromising monotheism which was the hallmark of Israel's faith. Material prosperity even provided Israel with opportunity to drift away from her creator and savior by the erection of more and more sacred pillars and altars. Unwilling to repent despite admonitions from God's messengers, Yahweh will then break those altars and sacred pillars and will also destroy the people.

Israel was a luxuriant vine that yielded abundant fruit. The fruit was not appreciated and used in the spirit of the covenant. Abundance proved a snare to Israel which with greater allurement created a rift between her and her God. Israel was unrepentant and prophetic utterances were of little avail. To vindicate his holiness Israel had to drink the cup of God's wrath. The luxuriant vine would be destroyed.

6.2 Jeremiah 2:21

Yet I planted you a vine
wholly of pure seed.
How then have you turned degenerate
and become a bastard vine?

In Chapter V we studied the saying of Jesus: "I am the true vine" (John 15:1) a saying which appears to have literary dependence on Jer 2:21. Jeremiah more than any other

prophet spoke about the vine: "vine," four times; "vines," two times; "vineyards," seven times; and he more than any other prophet used the vine metaphor for Israel.

Here the prophet, addressing Israel in Yahweh's name, says that Yahweh planted Israel as a *soreq*, genuine and unadulterated; which following the laws of nature should bear genuine fruit. Unfortunately that was not the case.

To appreciate Jer 2:21, it is necessary to put the unit in its overall context. It is part of a literary unit (2:20–28) where Jeremiah narrates the lies and infidelities committed by Israel. Here are some of her lies and their refutations by Jeremiah. Israel says:

v. 20 "I will not serve"—but Israel serves Baals under every tree and high place.
v. 23 "I am not defiled, I have not run after Baals"—whereas her footprints are found in every valley.
v. 24 "Who cares?"—but she knows that Yahweh cares for her
v. 27 Israel says to a piece of wood or stone "You have begotten me"—whereas Yahweh Sebaoth is the Maker of Israel.
v. 27 Israel turns her back to Yahweh—but in moments of trouble she shouts to God: "Get up! Save us!

Israel becomes a living falsehood, and for the above reasons is rightly described as a *soreq "high quality grape"* that produced *bᵉushim "stinking grapes"*. Judah destined to be royal and loyal, has turned out to be a wild frantic camel in her heat, desperate to find any partner.

By her activities, Judah flouted the basic rule of nature whereby like produces like. Instead of high quality grapes, she produces stinking grapes. The result is that the sins of Judah are so heinous that no scrubbing can remove them (v. 22).Judah's case is hopeless, beyond recovery. Jeremiah proves his case:

Judah is a slave who openly rebels and says, " I will not serve." v. 20
Judah abandoned Yahweh and lusted after Baals. v. 23
Judah is a prostitute, like a she-camel in heat: v. 23
Judah is like a thief caught in her disgrace. v. 26
Judah is a *soreq* that produces *bʿushim*. *v. 21*

For all these sins, Judah will be destroyed. What makes it impossible to stave the punishment is Judah's refusal to admit her sinfulness.

You say "I am blameless;
his anger has turned away from me."
And here am I passing sentence on you
because you say "I have not sinned" (v. 35).

In v. 23 we read too:

> How dare you say, "I am not defiled,
> I have not run after Baals."

So Judah will be destroyed: the invaders will loot her repeatedly and the following verse will be appropriately applied to her.

> Glean thoroughly as a vine
> the remnant of Israel;
> like a grape gatherer pass your hand again
> over its branches (Jer 6:9).

Even though gleaning the vineyard was forbidden (Lev 19:9; 23:22), the invaders and the looters will do precisely that, almost ensuring that there would be nothing left for Judah. Judah then becomes barren and produces no fruit.

> When I would gather them, says Yahweh,
> there are no grapes on the vine,
> no figs on the fig tree:
> even the leaves are withered
> and what I gave then has passed away from them (Jer 8:13).

There is no redeeming factor for Judah. Judah will be destroyed and be without a remnant, and this because the *soreq* produced *bᵉushim*.

6.3 Ezekiel 15:1–8

> The word of Yahweh came to me as follows:
>
> "Son of Man, how is the wood of he vine better than wood from the branch of any forest tree?
>
> Is the wood taken from it used to make anything?
> Do men make a peg out of it to hang a vessel?
>
> See: it is given for fuel to the fire.
> When fire burns both ends of it and its middle is charred;
> is it useful for anything?

> When it was whole, it was good for nothing,
> how much less when fire has consumed it and it is charred;
> can it be used for anything?
>
> 6 Therefore the Lord Yahweh says this:
> "Like the wood of the vine among the forest trees
> which I have given for fuel to fire,
> so will I give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
>
> I will set my face against them though they escape from fire,
> fire will nevertheless consume them.
> And you will know that I am Yahweh
> when I turn my face against them.
>
> I will make the land desolate because they have acted faithlessly"—
> it is Yahweh who speaks.

An interesting image of Israel as a vine is our present text!! It talks about the wood of the vine and compares it with wood of any branch of the forest trees. It is obvious that nothing can be carved from the wood of the vine: it cannot even serve as a peg. Hence it is thrown into fire and it burns easily. This piece of wood burns at both ends and is charred in the middle. When it was whole, it was no good: how much more when it is burnt at both ends and charred in the middle?

This parable has some problems. The vine is relished not for its wood but for its fruit.

> There is nothing particularly natural or enlightening in the idea of judging a vine by the material value of its timber and comparing it with any forest tree.[4]

Israel was upbraided for producing stinking grapes (Isa 5:2, 4) and not genuine fruit (Jer 2:21), but here Ezekiel changes course. Instead of concentrating on the fruit, in consonance with biblical tradition, in a surprising change of interest, he goes to consider the wood of the vine. By this sudden and deliberate change, the prophet destroys completely the dignity of the vine.

> From royal dignity the vine sinks under this unsuitable perspective to a position of contemptible uselessness and is now no longer distinguishable from the useless brushwood of the forest.[5]

In Ezekiel, the vine never was an object of divine predilection, and has never been

depicted as bearing any fruit, let alone useless fruit. The vine is radically worthless and useful only as fuel for fire.

The comparison is not between the quality of the vine and other trees but a comparison of their destinies.[6] The comparison goes so obviously against all the natural facts as to make obvious the intention with which it was made.

The comparison is directed against the popular philosophy and theology of Israel—the superiority of its race and assurance of divine protection in all circumstances. The prophet sets out to expose the *faux pas* of this boast, the groundlessness of the gift of election without the corresponding obligation of fidelity to the covenant. Hence the reason for its pride is the foundation for its shame.

Israel is the vine, one of the three royal plants of Palestine, transplanted from Egypt and towering higher than the cedars of Lebanon. The beauty and the grandeur of the vine, especially of *soreq,* is that it produces plenty of high quality grapes, not in the narcissistic contemplation of its beauty.

The parable is intended to strike at the false understanding and application of election. Just as the vine cannot be judged by the quality of its wood, so Israel cannot be judged by the fact of election.

In this parable, Ezekiel is not talking about a piece of wood which is presumed already dead: but more than that. The wood in question is the wood of the vine, burnt at both ends and charred at the center. This seems to symbolize the Assyrian captivity (722 B.C.), the deportation of Jehoiachin and of the royal officials (597 B.C.), while the charred middle represents the rump state of Judah with Jerusalem as its capital.

Zimmerli thinks that what we have is not mere prophetic teaching: it is the pronouncement of divine verdict.[7] The destruction of Judah is not the consequence of facts of history or inevitable decisions by political or military leaders: it is the judgment of God.

The decision is made because Israel by its conduct does not justify the arrogant claim that she is the vine; the chosen race: rather the true worth of Israel consists in the study of its wood. Israel's infidelity to the covenant empties all the advantages of election.

Just as the wood of the vine is no better than any other wood of the forest, so Israel has no cause for pride when compared with other nations: in fact, as other trees have better quality timber, so other nations have more advantages and prerogatives than Israel—military, economic, cultural and technological superiority—which in comparison with Israel, she pales in significance. What makes Israel unique is the free gift that Israel undeservedly received from Yahweh—election. This is clearly enunciated in Deut 7:6–8.

> For you are a people holy to Yahweh your God: Yahweh your God has chosen you to be his own out of the peoples on the face of the earth. It

> was not because you were more numerous than any other people that Yahweh set his love on you and chose you: in fact you were the fewest. But it is because Yahweh loves you and is keeping the oath he swore to your fathers, that Yahweh brought you out with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. . . .

Yahweh, besides turning his face away from his people symbolized by the Assyrian captivity and the first deportation into Babylonia, he now declares his intent:

> Like the wood of the vine among the forest trees
> which I have given to fire for fuel
> so I will give up the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
> I will set my face against them,
> though they escape from fire,
> fire will nevertheless consume them (Ezek 15:6–7).

The focus of Ezekiel is not on isolated acts of law-breaking—idolatry, breaking of the Sabbath, oppression of the poor—rather it is in the inward perversion of faith which precludes any meaningful conversion. Israel prides herself on election, puts false hope on the "Inviolability of Zion" but without living up to the responsibilities that flow from such privileges. Rather there was growing contempt for the nations, the *goyim*.

Obviously Yahweh chose Israel for himself out of all the nations of the earth (Deut 14:2). It is the election that makes Israel "the People of Yahweh" (Judg 5:11). Hence Micah could say:

> All the peoples walk
> each in the name of its god,
> but we walk in the name of Yahweh our God
> for ever and ever (Micah 4:5).

In Numbers 23:9 Israel is described as:

> A people dwelling alone
> not reckoning itself among the nations.

But there was a religiously impregnated nationalism which was fostered with the thought that Israel could evade the unconditional authority of divine norms and still safeguard itself from evil simply by a cultic attitude:

> Is not Yahweh among us?
> No evil shall come upon us (Micah 3:11).

This sense of security is found also in some Zion psalms (cfr Pss 46, 48). Referring to the temple, the Judeans said in the time of Jeremiah "God is with us, we are secure" (cfr Jer 5:12; 7:4, 10). Hence they continued to shout "peace" when there was no peace (Micah 3:5; Jer 6:14; 8:11; Ezek 13:10, 16).

> Israel called herself "the first of the nations" (Amos 6:1). But the same was said of Amalek:
>
> Amalek, first among the nations:
> But his posterity shall perish for ever (Numb 24:20).
>
> Will Israel suffer the fate of the Amalekites?

Amos fought bitterly the self complacency of Israel based on the false conception of election. After all, according to Amos, Israel cannot claim monopoly to God's providential care. Hence he says:

> "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me
> O people of Israel?" says Yahweh
> "Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt
> and the Philistines from Caphtor
> and the Syrians from Kir? (Amos 9:6)

Other important texts of Amos read as follows:

> Pass over to Calneh and see
> and thence to Hamath the great,
> then go down to Gath of the Philistines.
> Are they better than these kingdoms?
> Or is their territory greater than yours? (6.2)

Election when abused can lead to punishment.

> You only have I known
> of all the families of the earth
> therefore I will punish you
> for all your iniquities (Amos 3:2).

Divine election does not mean primacy or dominion. Exodus does not give Israel precedence over any nation: Rather it is a summons to righteousness and right living and allegiance to the covenant. In any case, what interest has Yahweh in Israel's material greatness?

More importantly, election negatively considered means rejecting anything and everything opposed to Yahweh. It means uncompromising monotheism, destruction of Canaanite altars, dashing the *masseboth* to pieces, hewing down the *Asherim*, and burning the graven images (Deut 7:5, 25)—because these are abominations to Yahweh. Now comes the question: How did Israel live up to these moral obligations?

Another compelling motive for election is love. God loved Israel and chose her descendants in her ancestors (Deut 7:8). Neither the size of her territory, nor material advantages nor moral integrity (Deut 9:5) could have won for Israel the free gift of election since Israel had neither the history nor the reputation to these.

This Israelite misconception of election brought her into direct collision with the prophets. Concretely there was conflict between belief in election and the implications of the covenant. The collision can be found among others in Amos 7:10–17; Jer 7, 26, 28, 37; Isa 1:10–20; Ezek 15; Amos 4:4–12.

However, with a politically orientated belief in election, Israel could not convince herself that Yahweh could ever deliver to shameful slavery the people he brought out of Egypt, out of smelting furnace (Deut 4:20) and established as his own nation.

The unfruitful vine was deprived of protection and trampled underfoot. Jerusalem would become like Shiloh (Jer 7:12–14) and Yahweh would drive out the Jerusalemites as he drove away their kinsmen, the entire race of Ephraim (Jer 7:15).

Here we have the history of Israel from the beginnings to the destruction of Jerusalem presented in a most succinct form and it is unfortunately a history of radical failure.[8] The sad aspect of this parable is that there is no promise of a remnant, no future regeneration. The anger of Yahweh is depicted as blazing forth without any signs of abating. The wood of the vine is burnt at both ends and the middle is charred. Those left in Jerusalem should not imagine that they are safe: divine chastisement will overtake them.

It should not be understood that Yahweh is implacable: rather since those left behind would not desist from apostasy like their kinsmen; divine justice will continue to hound them. The text ends on a sad note: the destruction will be colossal and total.

The conclusion is very disconsolate. When this happens the exiles will learn that it is Yahweh who has done all this, who has set his face against them, making the land desolate because of the perfidy of the people.

6.4 Ezekiel 17:1–10

1 The word of Yahweh was addressed to me as follows:

2 "Son of Man, propound a riddle, and speak in allegory to the house of Israel:

3 Say: 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh:
A great eagle with huge wings and wide span;
rich in plumage of many colors, came to Lebanon.
He took hold of the top of the cedar

4 broke off the topmost of its young twigs
carried it off to a land of trade
and set it in a city of merchants.

5 Then he carried off a seedling vine
and planted it in a fertile soil:
he placed it beside abundant waters,
he set it like a willow twig.

6 It sprouted and turned into a vine
not tall, but well spread out;
its branches grew towards the eagle
while its roots grew down.
So it became a vine,
it brought forth branches and put forth foliage

7 Then, there was another great eagle
with large wings and much plumage.
Behold, this vine turned its root towards him
and shot its branches towards him,
away from the bed where it was planted
for him to water them.

8 It was in a fertile field, by abundant waters
that the vine was planted,
to bring forth branches and bear fruit
and become a noble vine.'

9 Say: thus says the Lord Yahweh:
'Will it thrive?
Will he not pull out its roots
and snap off its fruit
so that all its fresh sprouting leaves wither?

It will not take a strong arm or many people
to pull it from its roots.

10 Behold, it is transplanted: will it thrive?
Will it not shrivel when the east wind blows?
Will it not wither in the bed where it was growing?

Ezekiel speaks about the vine using zoomorphic image of apocalyptic literature. It is in the form of a fable (Judg 9:7–15) and its literary form is elevated prose. Plants and animals play significant roles in apocalyptic literature (Ezek 19; Dan 4, 7, 8; Rev 13).

Ezekiel describes a great eagle and compares it with another eagle. The difference and the superiority of the first over the second is evident.

FIRST EAGLE	SECOND EAGLE
The Great Eagle הַנֶּשֶׁר הַגָּדוֹל	a great eagle נֶשֶׁר גָּדוֹל
Great Wings גְּדוֹל הַכְּנָפַיִם	great wings גְּדוֹל כְּנָפַיִם

The difference lies in the definite article. The first eagle had the definite article and the definite article can denote persons or things that are unique (G-K §126e) or express the superlative(G-K § 133g).

The first eagle had long pinions and thick feathers, rich with colored plumage. The eagle is the king of the birds and the lord of the skies, remarkable for its strength, velocity (2 Sam 1:23; Jer 4:13; Hab 1:8) and grace. The eagle is the only bird that can stare at the sun without being dazed. The eagle, however, does possess sinister and destructive powers (Lam 4:19; Job 9:26), all tallying with the description of the great eagle with the large wingspan and splendid coloring.

This eagle comes and alights on the splendid mountain range of Lebanon, a range impressive with its cedars. It alights on the top of a cedar, plucks off its top branch and carries it to the land of merchants. Then it carries off a seedling vine and plants it in a fertile soil by flowing waters. The seedling turns to be plant, not tall—probably the eagle wanted it so (not to compete with the vine of Ps 80:8–11)—but possessing average height and well spread out. Nothing is said about the cedar tree; all attention is on the eagle, royal and magnificent in splendor.

The eagle plants the seedling in a fertile soil by generous streams. It is as one would plant a willow twig in a fertile and well-watered garden plot. The result is immediate and spectacular. It grows, thrusting its root to the ground and sprouting new shoots and branches directed towards the eagle, which certainly takes keen interest in its growth. The eagle takes the branch to the city of merchants: then the eagle suddenly becomes a gardener. He plants the seedling by flowing waters to ensure its fruitfulness.

The second eagle is now introduced. This eagle is *gadol* "great" but not *haggadol the great:* it has large wings *g'dol k'naphaim "large wings"* but no" the large wings" *g^{e}dol hak^{e}nāphaim*. He has thick plumage *raḇ nōsâh* but not the fullest plumage.*male*

hannōsâh. Nor is there any mention of this eagle's colorful appearance.[9] What is captivating is the passive attitude of this new arrival: it does nothing; it is just there.

Then action moves on to the vine. Instead of the vine continuing to send its roots into the soil, it turns them towards the second eagle and stretches its branches towards him. It pulls itself away from the bed where it was planted and turns itself to the second eagle to water them.

It is helpful to make some observations about the vine:

It was planted in a fertile field
It was planted beside a wide flowing stream
It was to branch out and bear fruit
It was to become a noble vine
But It turned away from the eagle that had carefully and amply provided for it and opted for the second eagle whose primary characteristic was inertia.

The vine has betrayed its benefactor. The story of the Canticle of the Vine (Isa 5:1–7) is repeating itself. Just as the vine was condemned to destruction in the Canticle, here judgment is passed on the vine.

The tragic end of the vine is announced in these rhetorical questions:

Will it thrive? v. 9
Will he not pull out its roots?
Will he not cut off its branches?
Will all its sprouting leaves not wither?

Will it thrive? v. 10
Will it not shrivel when the east wind blows on it?
Will it not wither in its bed?

Though the east wind brought Israel salvation at the Exodus (Exod 10:13; 14:21; Ps 78:26) Ezekiel is thinking about the sirocco blowing east from the desert which dries and destroys every herbage on its way, akin to the scorching wind in Jonah 4:8. By directing its roots away from the water to the eagle, the vine deprives itself of its source of life—water—and renders itself vulnerable to the east wind of the desert.

The great eagle without doubt is Nebuchadrezzar II of Babylonia (605–562), while the lesser eagle represents Egypt under Necho II (609–594), Psammetichus II (594–589), and Hophra (588–566). The young shoot carried off from the top of the cedar is Jehoiachin (598–597) while the city of commerce is Babylon. The seedling which was planted is Zedekiah (598–587). Nebuchadrezzar takes a seed from the land, a son of the soil, who otherwise could never have got the throne and makes

him king so that the land may remain modest and without ambitions. Moreover on becoming a vassal king, he was made to swear an oath of fidelity and allegiance to Nebuchadrezzar.

But the vine, Zedekiah, decided to rebel: perjuring himself he asked for arms, horses, and troops from Egypt. Egypt has had the long standing tradition of inciting smaller states to rebel to their detriment against their overlords, promising support which rarely came. The prophets had consistently and persistently condemned military alliances with foreign nations, especially with Egypt (Hos 10:3; Isa 30:1–5; 31:1–3; Jer 2:18; 37:5–10; Ezek 16:26). The Assyrians called Egypt "the broken reed that pricks and pierces the hand of the one who leans on it" (2 Kgs 18:21; Isa 36:6). Zedekiah, instead of focusing his attention on Nebuchadrezzar, turned his gaze towards a rival kingdom, Egypt, desiring to be watered by it. That action removed him from the generous stream where he was watered; he will now shrivel and dry up.

According to Ezekiel, Nebuchadrezzar provided well for Judah who therefore had no need to look for assistance elsewhere. Babylonia was the great eagle, prodigious and stupendous, lord of the skies and ruler of the world at that time. Moreover Judah swore an oath of allegiance to which she was bound.

But Judah broke faith, an act which had disastrous consequences for the nation. According to the parable, Judah will be pulled out form its roots and the people will be uprooted from the land of promise. The "fresh sprouting leaves" and "its fruit" will be snapped off and wither—the cream of the population will be uprooted from the land of promise and transported into Babylonia. It will not cost Nebuchadrezzar or any power much human or material resources to bring about devastation of Judah because Yahweh will fight against the nation.

Judah will be thoroughly ravaged, utter desolation will overtake her like the sirocco of the desert. Transferring her allegiance to Egypt is symbolized by the transplantation of the vine; but it is the very opposite of the transplantation of the vine in Ps 80. Here we find an excellent paradox: at Exodus Israel was transplanted by God from Egypt into Canaan; there it became a big vine-tree, towering higher than the "cedars of God" in Lebanon. Now the reverse is the case: the vine transplants itself *on its own initiative*, contrary to God's command and approval, from Israel into Egypt. The result is that it will wither, dry up and shrivel: it will not thrive because God is not with her.

With the Promise, the Covenant, the Davidic Dynasty, the Temple, its cult, and the prophets; Judah had all the divine blessings and guidance that it needed. Judah was to remain humble and submissive to Yahweh to guide her to her destiny. But Judah preferred foreign alliances to trust in God.

As in the days of Ahaz when Judah rejected the waters of Shiloah flowing in tranquility to melt before the mighty and deep waters of the River (Isa 8:6) so Judah was once again rejecting God's plan of submitting to Nebuchadrezzar which was like the waters of Shiloah, and prefers the waters of the River—palpable support and alliance

with Egypt. Hence Yahweh in turn will bring upon her the mighty and deep waters of the River, the mighty forces of Nebuchadrezzar, which will inundate Judah, spread its wings the whole breadth of the country, bursting the banks (Isa 8:7–8) but this time covering the neck. This is also the sin of Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:13–19; 37 // Isa 36 and 37). Even the Northern Kingdom of Israel was warned against military alliances (Hos 5:13; 12:2). History continues to repeat itself.

Ezekiel goes on to explain his parable in vv. 11–21. Jehoiachin and the elites of Judah were deported so that the kingdom of Judah would remain modest and without ambition and so much easily maintain the treaty faithfully (17:14). But Zedekiah rebelled by sending envoys to Egypt to ask for horses and troops, thereby breaking the oath he swore in the name of Yahweh.

Perjury is a crime in Israel because it is profanation of the name of Yahweh (Lev 19:12). To break an oath is to make God a liar. Hence an oath must be kept even to one's hurt (Ps 15:4); this applies to rash oaths (Lev 5:4) and rash vows (Judg 11:29–40). Consequently Ezekiel inveighed against Zedekiah for breaking his oath.

> Can he break a covenant and yet escape? As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant with him he broke, in Babylon he shall die . . . . Because he despised the oath and broke the covenant, because he gave his hand and yet did all these things, he shall not escape (Ezek 17:15b-18).

Zedekiah committed a twofold crime—he broke the treaty with Nebuchadnezzar, and committed an act of treason against Yahweh (v. 19). For these acts, Pharaoh's army will be of no avail: siege works and trenches will be useless to him. Yahweh will throw a net around him; his pick soldiers will fall by the sword, and the survivors will be scattered to all the winds. His evil deeds will recoil on his head because of the many abominable acts he has committed.

For Ezekiel this is a just verdict of Yahweh based on the heinous crimes of Zedekiah and Judah. It is an irrevocable decree because Yahweh swore by his very self (vv. 16 and 19). Yahweh is holy who would neither condone nor brook perfidy so that his holy name be not profaned.

Chapter 17 goes on in vv. 22–24 to promise a future, a remnant and restoration to Judah. It raises an important critical question: Are these verses a letter addition? There are reasons for the doubt:

- vv. 11–21 are in prose whereas vv. 22–24 are in poetry.
- vv. 22–24 are alien to the main thrust of the arguments exposed in Ch. 17.
- The teaching of vv. 22–24 belong to the Restoration: it presupposes return to Judah and Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple.

Therefore I say that these verses are a posterior gloss, written to convince the Judeans that on account of the Promise made to Abraham, Yahweh will not abandon his people Israel for ever.

According to the glossator, action taken this time will be neither by the eagle nor by the vine but by Yahweh himself. Yahweh will take a shoot from the top of a cedar, from its highest branch and plant it on the top of a very high mountain, no longer on Lebanon range or any other mountain but on the mountain of Israel, where it will sprout, bear fruit and this time become not a vine but a cedar. All the birds of the air will find shelter on its branches. Then all creation, the trees included, will learn that he is Yahweh, who stunts tall trees and makes low ones grow, who withers the green and makes the withered green. Yahweh has spoken and will do it.

6.5 Conclusion

The vine, the epitome of good fruits, is the joy of the vineyard, symbol of life and fertility and symbol of Israel. As wine, the fruit of the vine, makes the gods and kings happy and merry (Judg 9:13), and also gladdens the human heart (Ps 104:15), so Yahweh is supposed to find happiness and joy in Israel and especially in Jerusalem "the joy of the whole earth" (Ps 48:3). Yahweh loves the gates of Zion, preferring it to all gates of Jacob (Ps 87:2), for Yahweh is great in Zion (Ps 99:2).

The vine symbolizes prosperity, restoration, and national peace. A foretaste of paradisiacal peace is found in "everyone dwelling under his vine and fig tree" (1 Kgs 4:25). In eschatological times, each nation will possess its vine and fig trees (Mic 4:4).

The vine plays a very important role in Israel's cult. The most joyful of Israel's feasts is the feast of grapes and it is called by various names—the feast of Tabernacles (2 Chr 8:13); the feast of Ingathering (Exod 23:16; 34:22); the feast of Booths (Lev 23:34; Deut 16:13; Zech 14:16). It is called "the feast of Yahweh" (Lev 23: 39; Judg 21:19) or simply "the Feast" i.e., the feast par excellence (1 Kgs 8:2, 65; 2 Chr 7:8; Neh 8:14; Isa 30:29; Ezek 45:23, 25). Many symbols are associated with this feast—water, light, twigs, the *Lulab*.

Israel is a vine planted by Yahweh and destined to bear abundant fruit. It is to bear authentic fruit at the appropriate season. Israel, unfortunately, bore stinking grapes (Isa 5:2) and degenerate fruit, thereby becoming a bastard vine (Jer 2:21). When Yahweh comes to his vineyard to gather fruits (Jer 6:9) he discovers to his utter dismay that "there are no grapes on the vine, no figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered" (Jer 8:13).

There is no ethical outcome of faith proper to Israel, no manifestations of the covenant. There is complete incongruity between the expectations of Yahweh and

the failure of Israel, an incongruity so fundamental as to require judgment and rejection.[10] By now the vine has become completely fruitless. Such is the natural progression of a people who reject the covenant."[11]

In the Old Testament, the image of Israel as vine is not a happy one. The history of Israel is history of failure. She was not docile to the teachings of the prophets and did not interpret accurately the signs of the times—e.g. the Assyrian Captivity. Judah appeared to drift aimlessly as though determined to meet her doom, which in the first instance came with the Babylonian Exile. We read from one of the Sages of Israel:

> "As the vine will accept no graft from another tree ,so the Community of Israel accepts no master but God." (Zohar: Genesis 239b).
>
> But God who is faithful will not abandon his people: he does not take back his gifts nor revoke his choice (Rom 9:29).
>
> "Like the fruit of the vine, first trodden, then placed on the royal table, Is Israel, first oppressed ,but destined for greatness". (Talmud: Nedarim 49b).
>
> That is why the Exile is followed immediately by the Restoration. From the Remnant, a New Israel will be born, a New People of God.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Church as Vine

When the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman,
born subject to the Law, to redeem those under the Law,
so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal 4:4–5)

Jesus, Word made flesh, who pitched his tent among us (John 1:14), began his public ministry saying:

> The time is fulfilled,
> the kingdom of God is at hand;
> repent and believe the Gospel (Mark 1:15).

His saving ministry of teaching and healing was accompanied by signs and wonders that confirmed it (Mark 16:20).

In the New Testament, the word "vine" is found seven times: three times in the passion narrative, at the institution of the cup when Jesus spoke about drinking of the fruit of the vine (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). It is found three times also in John (15:1–8) in the parable of the true vine, and once in Revelation (14:18) in the context of the eschatological vintage.

"Vineyard" occurs 26 times in the New Testament but mainly in Matthew:

- in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard, 20:1–16 (recorded by Matthew only);
- in the parable of the two sons, 21:28–32 (recorded by Matthew alone);
- in the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Matt 21:33–43; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19);
- in the parable of the fig tree in the vineyard, Luke 16:3–9 (recorded by Luke only).
- "Vineyard" in the plural is not found in the New Testament.

From these statistics, it is evident that the theme vineyard/vine is dear to Matthew. This is understandable from the author's background and the influence of Isaiah on his Gospel especially "the Canticle of the Vine." "The vineyard of Yahweh Sebaoth is the house of Israel" (Isa 5:7) seems to have made a deep impression on him.

The vine, therefore, is an image of the chosen people (Isa 5:1–7), used to illustrate how faithfully or not they walked the paths of the covenant. Jesus speaking about the vine/vineyard, neither called it nor compared it with the kingdom of heaven. Jesus used the parables to teach important doctrines but without any immediate reference to the mystery of the kingdom.

Since in the Old Testament "the vine/vineyard" was used of Israel, it will be necessary to study how Jesus used the vine for the House of Israel and how eventually it could be applied to the Church.

7.1 Jesus, the Vine/Vineyard and the Jews

Jesus was a Jew of Jewish ancestry, a Hebrew of Hebrews. Matthew was careful to trace his genealogy to David and to Abraham (1:1–16), thus making him son of David and son of Abraham. His background, his milieu and the faith he lived and practiced was Jewish. Luke was anxious to underscore that the parents of Jesus obeyed the Law: they circumcised him on the eighth day (2:21) and presented him in the temple (2:22–35). They undertook the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover (2:41–43) and did everything in fulfillment of the Law (2:39).

Jesus in his turn obeyed the Law: he worshiped at the synagogue in Nazareth on the Sabbath *as was his custom* (Luke 4:16), and addressed the synagogue as some Jews of his day customarily did (4:16–27). He went to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage feasts of the Passover (John 2:13; 6:4; 13:1–2), of the Tabernacles (John 7:1–24) and of the Dedication (John 10:22–23) and paid the temple tax (Matt 17:24–27). After curing the leper, Jesus insisted that he show himself to the priest and make the prescribed offering for a proof to the people (Luke 5:14). Though he corrected the excesses in the interpretation of the Law (Matt 12:1–14; 23:16–26), he summed up his attitude towards the Law in these solemn words:

> Think not that I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets: I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not one *iota*, not one dot, will pass from the Law until it is accomplished (Matt 5:17–18).

In order to highlight the place of the Chosen People in God's plan of salvation, Jesus deliberately restricted his ministry to the confines of Israel. On sending out the Twelve he charged them:

> Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans:
> go rather to the lost sheep of the house or Israel (Matt 10:5b-6).

To the Syro-Phoenician woman who requested the cure of her little daughter, Jesus gave this reply:

> Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's food
> and throw it to the dogs (Mark 7:12).

Was Jesus repeating the ignominious epithet of "the dog," "the Gentile dog" used frequently by the Jews when speaking about non-Jews? Speaking to the Samaritan woman by Jacob's well, Jesus said:

> You worship *what you do not know;*
> We worship *what we know,*
> for salvation is from the Jews (John 4:22).

The Twelve who would sit on the throne, to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28) were Jews. From these few biblical references, it is clear that Jesus had respect for the Jewish Law, customs, and traditions, for that was part of God's plan for human salvation.

This, however, is only a face of the coin. Jesus had problems with some members of his race especially with their spiritual leaders. This we shall consider both from the Synoptic and Johannine traditions. Reflection on Paul will come later.

7.1.1 The Synoptic Tradition

We use Matthew as representative of the Synoptics because the evangelist is more eloquent than Mark and Luke on this issue. The Pharisees and Sadducees who came for baptism without *metanoia* were called "brood of vipers" (3:8). Amazed at the faith of the Centurion and contrasting it with the unbelief of his people, Jesus warned that many would come from the East and the West to sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob while the subjects of the kingdom would be turned out into the dark where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth (8:10–12). Accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul, he warned that sins against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven (12:32). These adversaries constituted a wicked adulterous generation always looking for signs (12:39).

Those whom Jesus targeted in his speeches were the Jewish leaders, especially the Scribes and the Pharisees. The Sadducees, the Chief Priests, and members of the priestly families began to feature prominently in the last period of his public ministry, especially during his passion. These leaders were hypocrites (15:7), blind

leading the blind (15:14). Because of their ways and teachings, Jesus warned his disciples to keep away from their yeast (16:6).

It is necessary to note that Jesus' language towards his adversaries grew stronger as the events of his earthly life unfolded. The more consistently the Jewish leaders challenged his authority and persistently grew in their unbelief and consequently determined more than ever to kill him, the stronger Jesus' language became. In Chapter 21, where the Chief Priests and the Elders challenged him:

> By what authority are you doing these things,
> and who gave you the authority? (v. 23),

Jesus replied with three parables—the parable of the Two Sons; of the Wicked Husbandmen and of the Wedding Feast (21:28–22:14). By means of these parables Jesus taught that those called did not honor the invitation, thus making it imperative to call others to take their place. Chapter 23 records the strongest and harshest language on the lips of Jesus in the entire Biblical tradition—the seven woes directed against the Scribes and the Pharisees and also holding them responsible and liable for the blood of every holy man that has been shed on earth: from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah (23:25–36).

Jerusalem that consistently killed the prophets and stoned those sent to her would even at his late hour refuse the protection and salvation of Jesus, who wanted to gather her as a hen gathers her chicks (23:37). Rather Jerusalem finished up the work that her ancestors began (23:32).

In the great eschatological discourse of Chapter 24, the destruction of the temple foreboded the destruction and the dispersion of the Jewish race and the first thunder of the final day of judgment. It was also a sign of his return in glory and the anticipation of the end of the world. In the story of the Ten Bridesmaids and of the Talents (25:1–30) we encounter a people who did not respond adequately to their call—the vine that did not bear abundant fruit.

During his Passion, the Scribes and the Pharisees were joined by the Chief Priests and the Elders to encompass his death. False witnesses had to be brought, and even with their false accusations, they could not make any cogent, coherent case against Jesus (26:59–60). At the trial, Pilate who came to realize that Jesus was innocent (27:18), wanted to release him (27:11–26) and above all publicly absolved himself of all responsibility for this man's death, to which the Jews replied: "His blood upon us and upon our children" (27:26).

It would appear, according to the Matthean tradition, that it was not the crowds, οἱ ὀχλοι, *hoi ochloi,* nor the rabble, but the Jews ὁ λάος *ho laos*—עם i.e. "the People of God" readily accepted the responsibility of Jesus' death; an onus Pilate did not dare take on himself. After the Resurrection, the Chief Priests bribed the guards to say that the disciples stole the body while they were asleep (28:11–15).

From the Synoptic tradition, exemplified in Matthew, right from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, he frequently came into opposition with the Jewish Leaders, the opposition, which grew with time. Cases of disagreement began with the interpretation of the Law and its application. The seed of separation was sown early enough. This hardly created an atmosphere for the vine to bear abundant fruit. That Jesus would cause the rise and the fall of many in Israel was already being realized. The vine was not yielding "high quality grapes" but producing only "stinking grapes".

7.1.2 The Johannine Tradition

In John's Gospel, the word "Jew" came to assume a special meaning in contradistinction to "Israelite". While "Israelite" meant members of the chosen race, whom, while following the Law were nevertheless open to the teachings of Jesus and allowed themselves to be convinced by the teachings, the miracles, signs, and wonders wrought by Jesus. The word "Jew," on the other hand, came to signify those elements in Judaism that pertinaciously and indefatigably opposed Jesus, that rejected his doctrine; those for whom the signs and wonders caused all the more reason to put him to death (11:45–51). This group was found mainly among the leaders.

Feasts provided Jesus occasions for longer and more detailed instructions (5:1–47; 6:26–66; 7:16–52; 8:12–58; 10:22–38) the climax being (13:12–17:26) which was pronounced in the context of the Passover. In the heat of argument Jesus did not hesitate to tell the Jews that the devil was their father, who was the liar and the father of lies. Their desire to murder Jesus was walking in the footsteps of their father who was a murderer from the beginning (8:44). To this the Jews retorted by calling Jesus a Samaritan and one possessed by the devil (8:48).

The Gospel of John constituted a dialectic of light and darkness, life and death, heaven and the *kosmos*. Some of the teachings of Jesus were diametrically opposed to the beliefs and praxes of the Jews. The cleansing of the temple, at the first Passover of Jesus' public ministry, which recalled the oracle of Mal 3:1–4, implicitly claimed for Jesus the mission of the Messiah.

For John, Jesus was not a man born of the Jewish race who became the Messiah: on the contrary, he was conceived as the pre-existent Logos who took flesh. His divine nature was ever present to the evangelist as he wrote his Gospel. How would that doctrine be received by the Jews?

It was clear from the Synoptic and Johannine traditions that not all the teachings of Jesus were welcome. Antipathy grew which with time developed into hatred. The authority and the popularity of Jesus challenged the position and the stand of the Jewish leaders. The major point of disagreement was the Law and with time the person and the mission of Jesus became the real issue. Jesus' claim that God was his Father (8:16), that he was the Son of God (19:7) constituted blasphemy for the Jews.

In conclusion, for various reasons and from different approaches, the Gospels all agree that the Jewish leaders could not tolerate Jesus any more and therefore sought the death penalty which they obtained. Since Israel was the vine, would this action produce the desired abundant fruit?

7.2 The Church and Judaism

Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity, two of the great world's religions, emerged from the same matrix—Second Temple Judaism.[1]

From the foregoing, it would be incorrect to imagine that Jesus was not loved, followed, appreciated, and cherished by the populace. On the contrary, the Gospels bear abundant witness to the fact that Jesus pulled crowds: in fact, they could follow him for three days without caring about their feeding (Matt 15:32). His miracles were indications that he indeed was the prophet who was to come into the world (John 6:15) and in him, God had visited his people (Luke 7:16). The crowd was impressed by the style of his teaching because he taught with authority, unlike the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt 7:28). The crowd was equally amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips (Luke 4:22). Even his enemies were forced to admit: "No man ever spoke like this man" (John 7:46).

While the Chief Priests and the Elders were plotting his death, they were careful to ensure that the arrest should not be on a festival, lest there be a tumult among the people (Mark 14:2; Matt 26:4–5; Luke 22:1–2). On Jesus' way to Golgotha, he was followed by a large number of men and women who mourned and lamented for him (Luke 22:27).

The last week of the earthly life of Jesus recorded his popularity at its apex. That was his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, his victory march into his capital city, comparable to the victory parade of a Roman conqueror returning to Rome leading the legions loaded with slaves and spoils of war. This victory march is one of the few events in the life of Jesus that is recorded by the four evangelists (Matt 21:1–9; Mark 11:1–10; Luke 19:28–38; John 12:12–19). The welcome was such that if the children and the crowd did not shout songs of praise, the very stones would have cried out (Luke 19:40).

The Great Sanhedrin, perplexed by the miracles and signs of Jesus was compelled to admit defeat:

> What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him (John 11:47–48).

Even the Greeks who came for the Passover wanted to see Jesus (John 12:20–30).

From the above, it is clear that the teachings of Jesus were well received by the ordinary people, the עם־הארץ *am haareṣ* literally:" the people of the land". Israel,

the vine, bore fruits and good fruits even though, among the grain, there were tares (Matt 13:24–30). It was mainly the religious leaders who opposed Jesus but they were in the minority, though a powerful minority. Even with the Great Sanhedrin, Jesus had sympathizers; Joseph of Arimathea whom Mark recognized as a prominent member of Council (15:43, cf Luke 23:50) and Nicodemus (John 3:1; 7:50).

The situation was very complex. The person and the mission of Jesus remained an enigma to the crowd:

> How long will you keep us in suspense?
> If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly (John 10:24).

The determination of Thomas: "Let us go too, and die with him" (John 11:16), is not an expression of faith. The enduring concern of the disciples about their places in the kingdom (Matt 20:20–23; Luke 22:24) and their anxiety about the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6) prove that the spiritual nature of Jesus' kingdom to Israel was still foreign to them, even though the three announcements of his passion and resurrection were dutifully reported in all synoptic traditions.

Matthew	(16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19)
Mark	(8:31–33; 9:31–32; 10:32–34)
Luke	(9:22; 9:44; 18:31–34)

Incidentally, Luke more than other Synoptics recorded Jesus' predictions of his passion and resurrection as coming from his own lips (2:33–35; 12:50; 17:25; 24:7, 26, 46). But in spite of all these monitions, the actions of the Twelve were disconcerting: lethargy of the chosen three at Gethsemani (Matt 26:36–46); the betrayal of Judas (Matt 26:47–50); desertion by the Twelve (Matt 26:26); and the denial of Peter (26:69–75). It was, therefore, not surprising when the women gave the Twelve the news of the resurrection they considered it *utter nonsense* (Luke 24:11).

Consequently, it is not easy to assess the performance of the vine in Israel's time during the ministry of Jesus. Jesus was loved and doted on by the crowds. Judging from his miracles, the crowd had little difficulty with hailing him as "Son of David," "the Messiah," "the one who is to come into the world." Did their acclamation fall short of belief in his divinity—did they acclaim him as "Son of God" (Matt 22:41–46)? How is Martha's proclamation of John 11:27 to be understood? It is only with his resurrection that his divinity was manifested.

The ministry of Jesus did not produce *soreq* in his lifetime. The crowds were people of little faith; the apostles were no exceptions (Matt 8:26; 14:31; 17:20; Luke 12:28). However, the seed was planted. That seed was to die with the physical death of Jesus to bear much fruit (John 12:24).

7.3 The Early Days of the Church

The Church was born on the Cross of Christ. Hence St. Augustine teaches:

> Ex latere Domini dormientis, id est, in passione morientis, et in cruce percusso de lancea (Joan. xix, 34) manaverunt Sacramenta, quibus formaretur Ecclesia (Enarratio in Ps cxxxviii, 2) i.e. "From the side of the sleeping Lord, i.e. in the passion of his death, struck with the lance on the cross, came forth the Sacraments by which the Church was formed."

The Gospel relates that when Christ had died and was still hanging on the cross . . . a soldier pierced his side with the spear, and at once there came out water and blood. The one was a symbol of baptism, the other of the mysteries. . . , especially the Eucharist. It is from these two that the holy Church has been born . . . Now the symbols of baptism and the mysteries came from his side. It was from his side, then, that Christ formed the Church, as from the side of Adam, God formed Eve (Cfr John Chrysostom: Cat 3:13–19).

The Church was born from among Jews resident in Judaea and Galilee, who were acquainted with Jesus during his lifetime (John 19:34). On Pentecost day, these and others were to learn publicly about the resurrection of Christ, a proclamation that was supported and vindicated by signs and wonders wrought by the Apostles (Acts 2). These gave their allegiance to Jesus and were baptized into his death and resurrection and sealed with the Holy Spirit.

The little community remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Sharing their goods in common, they made sure no one was in want (Acts 2:42–45).

Christians initially were Jews both in race and in religion, worshiping in the Temple (Acts 3:1), frequenting synagogues both in Jerusalem and in Damascus (Acts 9:20–22). On Pentecost day, Peter addressed the crowd as *Men of Israel* (Acts 2:22) and the exaltation of Jesus for granting repentance and forgiveness *to Israel* (Acts 5:31). God's people, ὁ λαος, *ho laos* is still co-terminus with the nation of Israel (Acts 7:34; 10:2, 41).

The Apostles continued to preach every day in the temple and in private homes: their proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus was never interrupted (Acts 5:42). The result was that the word of God continued to spread, the number of disciples in Jerusalem greatly increased, and a large group of priests made their submission to the faith (Acts 6:2).

There were, however, some distinguishing features about his new community besides those mentioned earlier in Acts 2:42–45. Even though they prayed with other Jews in the temple, they alone, as followers of Jesus, met in homes for the

breaking of bread (Acts 2:46). This alone is a mark of identity and also of separation: the Church and the Synagogue were beginning to go their separate ways.

On Pentecost day, all were welcomed into the new community: no one was excluded on any grounds whatsoever, not even one's past records. The only requirement was profession of faith in Jesus who died and rose whom they proclaimed MESSIAH and KYRIOS (Acts 2:36). As a sign of faith one would be baptized; be totally immersed into the mystery of Christ as a sign and effective means of incorporation into His Body. Though the majority of the believers were Jews, the Church by its very nature, was not culturally, or ethnically bound.

The Church walked the path of Israel. The Apostles did not disassociate themselves from the temple or the Synagogue: in fact, they observed the Mosaic Law (Acts 15; Gal 2:11–14). Even after his third missionary journey, Paul discharged his vows in the temple and paid the expenses for four Nazarites performing their vows (Acts 21:24) .James, the brother of the Lord, remained a firm practicing Jew at all times (Acts 15:13–21; 21;24).

The Church, however, remained a human society and consequently not immune from problems. Even from earliest times there were tensions, the first narrated being between the Greek speaking and Aramaic speaking Jews. This led to the Institution of the Seven, who, besides looking after the material needs of the community took on also to evangelism. Stephen debated with members of the Synagogue of Freedmen (Acts 6:9), a debate which later ended in his death.

The death of Stephen brought a new dimension to the life and growth of the early Church. Prior to that, the followers of the Way had remained primarily in Jerusalem, especially the apostles, but with the bitter persecution against the Church, which started in Jerusalem, the disciples fled to the country districts of Judaea and Samaria while the apostles remained in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). These disciples preached the good news wherever they went, and traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch—the second most important city of the Roman Empire after Rome. These preached primarily to the Jews whereas those from Cyprus and Cyrene preached to the Greeks as well (Acts 11:18–20).

Philip preached in a Samaritan town (Acts 8:5) and baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40) and preached from Azotus to Caesarea (Acts 8:40). The believers in Samaria were strengthened in their faith by the reception of the Holy Spirit through the imposition of hands of Peter and John (Acts 8:14–17).

With persecution, the greater number of converts came from the Gentile stock. This form of evangelization assumed a new dimension with the call of Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, a special vessel of election to bring the name of Jesus to the pagans, before kings, and to the entire people of Israel (Acts 9:15).

Paul in his missionary journeys preached to the Jews first. This would invariably be followed by persecution on the part of the Jews and so compel Paul and his co-workers to turn to the Gentiles. At Antioch in Pisidia, Paul was constrained to tell the Jews:

> It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it from you and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46).

Such attacks were recorded also at Iconium (Acts 14:4–5), Lystra (14:19), Thessalonika (17:5–9), Beroea (17:13), Ephesus (19:8–9) and of course in Jerusalem. At Corinth, when the Jews opposed and reviled him, Paul took his cloak and shook it in front of them:

> Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent.
> From now on, I will go to the Gentiles (18:6).

That is a strong statement and a powerful gesture; just a he shook off the dust of his feet at Antioch in Pisidia and proceeded to Iconium (13:51). These notwithstanding, Paul as recorded in the Acts, continued to give priority attention to the Jews. He was invariably disappointed and his last encounter with Jews in Rome recorded his boundless disillusionment in this soliloquy:

> Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles: they will listen (Acts 28:28).

The Acts ends on a sad note; the Jews who rejected Jesus, now continue to reject his Gospel. The Gentiles welcome it and are glad. This is a turning point in the history of salvation and particularly of the Early Church.

Within the very bosom of the Church, however, there were divergent views and practices which had to be reckoned with. Among the neo converts were not only the עם־הארץ but also priests (Acts 6:7) and Pharisees (15:5). With the admission of Gentiles into the Church, not only doctrinal issues, e.g. the importance and role of the Law in salvation, but also practical issues, e.g. Jews and Gentiles living and worshiping together, had to be given serious and immediate attention.

Would the Gentiles have to be naturalized into Judaism and accept circumcision and the observance of the Mosaic Law and the traditions of the fathers to be saved, or was faith alone in Jesus Christ sufficient to save? For salvation through Jesus Christ alone meant that the validity of the Law as a means of salvation ended.[2]

Though the Council of Jerusalem gave a ruling (Acts 15:22–29), the problem persisted both in Palestine and in the Diaspora. In Jerusalem, the charges brought against Paul were not his preaching about Jesus but his observance and non-observance of the Law: preaching against the Jewish nation and profaning the temple (Acts 21:28–29)—the same charges brought against Jesus (Matt 26:51) and Stephen (Acts 6:13–14).

The Law alone did not create a rift in the Church: even though, with the ministry of Paul and other evangelizers, the Church became more and more Gentile and less and less Jewish. It would appear that the Jews of Palestine did not persecute the Church as much as those of the Diaspora. Those who challenged Stephen were Jews from Cyrene and Alexandria (Acts 6:9); Saul was from Tarsus (Acts 9:11; 21:39); those who made life impossible for Paul and his followers were Jews from Asia Minor; those responsible for Paul's arrest in Jerusalem were Jews from Asia (Acts 21: 27). Persecution of Christians both within and outside Palestine put serious strain on Jewish/Christian relationship. Christianity was no longer considered a Jewish sect (ἄιρεσις *hairesis* Acts 24:5,14; 28:22).

Although dispute between Jesus and the Jewish leaders centered on the Law, with time, the person and the mission of Jesus became the issue. The Christians who believed and preached publicly that Jesus was *the Messiah* and *the Son of God* (John 20:31) claimed also for themselves, the patriarchs, and the prophets as their forerunners in faith. The WAY was the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham: the Cross of Jesus was the enactment of the new (Jer 31:31) and the eternal covenant (Ezek 16:60; 37:26) in the blood of Jesus which gave birth to a new People of God, a new עם יהוה *-am YHWH* , λάος τοῦ θεοῦ, *laos tou Theou* , the Church. Salvation came no longer from the Law but from faith in Jesus Christ who died and rose and who is κύριος και χριστός *Kyrios kai Christos* LORD and CHRIST Acts 2:36): משיח MESSIAH and above all יהוה.. YHWH.

The Christians took over the Jewish Bible, especially the LXX, which they made their patrimony and used extensively in the Liturgy, Catechesis, and also persuasively in the disputes with Jews. To crown it all, the Christians boldly asserted that the Church was the fulfillment of Israel's hope.

With these affirmations, and each side holding tenaciously to its convictions, there was only one option: RUPTURE IN RELATIONSHIP.

7.4 The Rupture

These are some fundamental tenets of Judaism which Dunn calls "the Four Pillars of Second Temple Judaism;" namely Monotheism, Election, Covenant, and the Land.[3] To these I would like to add: Messianism and the Remnant.

The Jews studying and reflecting on Holy Scriptures believed that Israel was called in Abraham (Gen 12:1–9). The Promise which was made to Abraham was unconditional and without any obligations on his part (Gen 15). The same applied to the permanence of Davidic dynasty (2 Sam 7:14–16). Sin and God's just punishment were mitigated by the teaching on the Remnant, with the assurance that *Shear Jasuḇ* "A remnant shall return" (Isa 7:3).

After divine chastisement, the Remnant will return to Yahweh and when the

Messiah comes, together with him, they shall establish God's kingdom in a final and definitive manner. Consequently, election will last like the sun in the firmament.

With some basic tenets of Christianity, analogically corresponding to the Four Pillars of Second Temple Judaism, e.g. the Trinity, the Messiahship of Jesus, His Resurrection, the Role of the Church in Salvation, it was imperative that a rupture would inevitably take place. And indeed it did take place. However, it was neither immediate nor sudden. We report the events as they occurred in the Scriptures and some Jewish writings.

It began even in the lifetime of Jesus with his attitude towards the Law and the temple; calling God His Father and calling himself Son of God. Acceptance or not of his resurrection would inexorably lead either to belief in his Messiahship and Divinity or to their denial.

Along side with this was the mission of the Church. The little flock was mandated to witness to Jesus in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). They were commanded to make disciples of all nations πάντα τὰ ἔθνη *panta ta ethne* (Matt 28:19).

With time, resistance of the Jews to the Gospel grew stiffer and the mood especially with regard to evangelism deteriorated from opposition to pessimism; a situation rather reinforced by Jewish persecution of Christians. A perplexing situation arose: while the Jews, the People of the Covenant, opposed the Gospel and this tenaciously; the Gentiles, the *goyim,* welcomed it. Some explanation had to be given to this phenomenon.

Searching the Scriptures, Christians discovered a pattern of thought and action in Jewish history, which is succinctly summarized in the Acts:

> You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your father persecute? They killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered. You who received the Law as delivered by the angels and did not keep it (Acts 7:51–53).

The arguments between Jesus and his opponents especially in the Fourth Gospel was hardly about the rabbinical interpretation of the Law but faith in Jesus and in his testimony. The rejection of prophets and teachers sent by God to Israel was seen to be characteristic of the Jews. Was there any prophet who had it easy with the Jewish people—Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea? It would appear that obduracy of the Jews was preordained (Matt 13:14–15 following the LXX of Isa 6:9–10).

Many parables of Jesus, could from hindsight, be interpreted as response of the Jews—the Tares (Matt 13:24–30), the Two Sons (Matt 21:28–32); the Wedding

Feast (Matt 22:1–14). In the eschatological discourse of Matthew (24:1–44 // Mark 13:1–37; Luke 21:5–33), Jesus made specific reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and actually wept over the city (Matt 23:37–39).

The destruction of Jerusalem, its aftermath, its theological interpretation by Christians, was a landmark in Church/Synagogue relationship. With the crushing of the Jewish revolt and the destruction of the Temple, Jewish sects disappeared: the Essenes in A.D. 68; the Sadducees in A.D. 70; the Herodians and the Zealots in A.D. 73 or 74. Only Pharisaism survived. Many Christians interpreted the fall of Jerusalem and the torching of the Temple as God's just punishment for disowning and crucifying Jesus, the Son of God.

With the formal rejection of Christianity by the Synagogue, the Pharisees became the uncontested leaders of Judaism. Those who did not take part in the great Revolt obtained permission from the Romans to found a Rabbinical Academy at Javneh (Jamnia), first under Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai and later under Rabban Gamaliel II. The academy set out to reformulate Judaism and to save it from extinction and absorption. The work done culminated in the MISHNA c.A.D. 200. Pharisaic Judaism was the strongest, the spiritual, and the most effective opponent of the Christian faith before and after the fall of Jerusalem. It was the cause of the relative unsuccess of Christian teaching.[4] Could that explain why in the Gospels it was the pharisaic party that got the most castigation from Jesus?

The first and the most important consequence of the Academy of Javneh was the parting of ways between Judaism and Christianity. Jews and Christians no longer worshiped together: suspicion and animosity intensified. False, vicious tales and disparaging statements were directed against each other. Some Jews spat when they called the name "Christian" or "Jesus Christ." What began as a Jewish fight for survival resulted in bitter and relentless hatred. A sad page in Jewish/Christian relationship had begun which would last for centuries.

One of the works attributed to the academy is the *Birkat-ha-minim,* literally a *blessing of heretics*. It was far from being a blessing; in fact it was a curse upon those whom the Jews considered heretics. It was inserted into the *Shmoneh Esreh*.

The *Shmoneh Esreh,* the eighteen blessings, were considered by the Jews as prayer *par excellence* and hence recited three times daily by every pious Jew. The *minim* was inserted after the Twelfth Blessing. It was considered an effective way of identifying Christians and of discouraging their attendance of the Synagogue worship. Some great names associated with the *minim* were Rabban Gamaliel II and Samuel the Small.

I wish to present two versions or editions of *Birkat ha-minim:*

> As for slanderers, let there be no hope, and let all wickedness perish as in a moment; let all these enemies be speedily cut off, and the dominion of arrogance do thou uproot and crush, cast down and humble speedily

> in our days. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who breakest the enemies and humblest the proud.[5]

Jocz records another edition of the same prayer which he says was found in a Cairo Genizah by S. Schecter and it runs thus:

> For the renegades (lameshummadim,), let there be no hope, and may the arrogant kingdom (= Rome?) soon be rooted out in our days, and the Nazarenes (we-ha-nozrim) and the minim perish as in a moment and be blotted out from the book of life and with the righteous may they not be inscribed. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who humblest the arrogant.[6]

It is almost certain that for historical expediency the *minim* may have undergone alterations for fear of censorship and possible accusation of blasphemy. It does appear that the original text mentioned "Christians" as in the edition found by Schechter because the Fathers repeatedly asserted that the Jews cursed Christians in their Synagogues three times daily. St. Jerome says:

> . . . . :quod provocati a Domino ad poenitentiam, et postea ab Apostolis ejus, usque hodie perseverant in blasphemiis, et ter per singulos dies in omnibus synagogis sub nomine Nazarenorum anathematizent vocabulum Christianum
>
> (Jerome : In Isaiam Lib. II Cap v, 81)

At the death of Jesus on the Cross, the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom (Matt 27:51; Mark 15:38), thus announcing a rupture. In the Markan tradition, in the verse which follows v. 38 immediately, the Gentile centurion proclaims Jesus, "Son of God" (v. 39). Jesus will indeed cause the rise and the fall of many in Israel as predicted (Luke 2:34).

Following the *minim,* Christians were excluded from the synagogue which was one of the greatest punishments that could be meted out to any Jew. It meant exclusion them from the community of Israel and banishment from cult. It was John who first spoke about excommunications:

ἀποσυναγώγον	ποιεν	(John 16:2)
ἀποσυναγωγον	γενέσθαι	(John 9:22; 12:42)
Luke uses the verb	ἀφορίξειν	ϛ6:22).

With excommunication all contacts, personal, or business was forbidden. About those excommunicated we read:

> One does not sell to them or receive from them or take from them or give to them. One does not teach their sons a trade, and does not obtain healing from them. (t. Hull. 2.20–21).

The parting of the ways took place gradually but in the second century it was complete. Relationship became bitter, followed by mutual accusations and recriminations. The Jews who once knew and followed God turned their academy into a school of ignorance about Jesus. "You do not know Him" (John 7:28).

A statement of Jesus during one of his polemics with the Jews at the feast of Tabernacles then comes alive:

> You do not know me, nor do you know my Father;
> if you did know me, you would know my Father as well (John 8:19).

Since they rejected the Son whom the Father sent, they have refused to honor the Father (John 5:23). Jesus goes on to say:

> You have never heard his voice
> You have never seen his shape
> and his word finds no home in you (5:37).

all because you have not believed in the one the Father sent (v. 38).

The rupture was the figure and sign of God's final judgment. The parable of the ten bridesmaids (Matt 25:1–13): of the talents (25:14–30) of the wedding feast (Matt 22:1–14); of two men in the field and two women at the mill (Matt 24:40–41); all culminated in the eschatological judgment of Matthew 25:31–46 which spoke about the separation of sheep from goats. This rupture will be so intense that in some circumstances it would break solidarity even within families (Matt 10:34–38; Luke 14:26).

The rupture was the end of all dialogue and often occasion for persecution. Each side claimed to be fighting on God's side anchoring itself on the Promise and the Covenant. Such a situation hardly created a healthy atmosphere for the vine to produce good quality fruit.

7.5 Continuity Between the Synagogue and the Church

Jesus had foretold that he would be rejected and crucified (Mark 8:31). That, however, did not mean the end to God's design for human salvation. In the choice of the Twelve, Jesus wanted to constitute a new community of the People of God, a new Israel of twelve tribes, whose membership would not be determined by laws of biology, geography, or culture but by the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The existence of a newly constituted "People of God" which is not purely Jewish calls into question the meaning of Israel. This new community which was brought to birth by the shedding of the blood of Jesus on the Cross; this new community of believers: how does it relate to Israel of the Temple, especially as there were convincing arguments that Jesus wanted to establish a new community based on the Covenant of his blood?

It is not easy to define the relationship between the Synagogue and the Church; and attempts so far have not been entirely satisfactory. The Church has been called "The New Israel," "The True Israel," "A Replacement of the Old People of God." For Jesus, it is certain that the two realities, though not opposed were nonetheless distinct. Christianity was to have its identity, its independent existence. Hence Jesus warns that no one pours new wine into old wine skins (Matt 9:37; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37) and asserts categorically "New wine must be put into fresh wine skins" (Luke 5:38). "What is old only gets more antiquated until in the end it disappears" (Heb 8:13).

Since the argument of new wine and fresh skins stems from the question of fast among the disciples of the Pharisees and John the Baptist, Jesus' answer is unambiguous: the Spirit of the Gospel cannot be brought into harmony with the spirit of pharisaic observances.[7]

It is self evident that while there was discontinuity between the Synagogue and the Church, there was considerable measure of continuity. The Church is not *aliquid inauditum*. It was not an aeon, an extra-terrestrial entity which descended and overpowered humanity. The Church, to be able to carry out her mission, must be thoroughly human, just like the founder.

The overwhelming evidence for continuity makes Dodd say:

> A manifest disintegration of existing system is to be preliminary to the appearance of a new way to embody it. And yet it is the *same* temple, first destroyed, that is rebuilt. The new community is still Israel: there is continuity through the discontinuity. It is not a matter of replacement but of resurrection.[8]

The Church inherited a lot from Judaism—the Promise, the Covenant, the Sacred Books, Authentic Tradition. This patrimony included Jesus and the Twelve who were all Jews. Jesus' love and respect for authentic Jewish traditions was unquestionable.

Matthew teaches a continuity between Israel and the community of the Gospel. This kingdom is the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, the ultimate realization of the Torah and Judaism. This new order is not the abrogation of the ancient covenant: rather it is its fulfillment. A change would take place but within Israel. The people of Israel, the community of salvation, the vineyard of Yahweh Sebaoth, will continue to exist though not through the same leaders nor subjected to the same

ordinances.[9] The covenant broken (Exod 32) and renewed (Exod 34) will give way to the new and eternal covenant.

Jesus foretold the overthrowing of the temple (Mark 13:1–2) and the destruction of Jerusalem (Mark 13:14–20) but said no word about the future of the Jewish people. The temple must disappear because its order is superseded; it must disappear violently because its leaders were unfaithful. These events will therefore initiate the eschatological kingdom promised in the chapter.

Fulfillment implies continuity *and* discontinuity. As long as the followers of Jesus were drawn almost exclusively from the Jewish race, the new community would constitute no more than a community of restored Jewish people, a continuation of Israel κατὰ σάρκα—Israel according to the flesh. However, it told a different story when the majority of members were Gentiles. Membership alone signaled both continuity and rupture as well.

No New Testament texts speak about total apostasy of Israel. On the contrary the Acts was careful to highlight the increase of the Jewish population in the composition of the Early Church. On Ascension Day, the little flock numbered 120 (1:15). On Pentecost day, it grew to 3000 (2:41). After the appearance of Peter and John before the Sanhedrin, the number grew to 5000 (4:4); in 6:7 it is said that a good number of priests made their submission to the faith, as well as the Pharisees (15:5).

It would be more accurate to say that there were not many converts from Judaism to Christianity as there were from the Gentile race. Neither would it be correct to say that the Gentiles embraced the Christian faith because the Jews repudiated it. Judaism had prior to Christianity taken on to evangelism proved by the increasing number of "God-fearers" and "Proselytes." Jesus speaks about Scribes and Pharisees who traverse land and sea to make a single proselyte (Matt 23:15). On Pentecost day, proselytes and God-fearers from every nation under heaven were in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5; 11). The conversion of Cornelius and his household had nothing to do with historical Jewish—Christian relationship (Acts 10:34–48).

In this new community, the leadership is renewed (Matt 21:31–32), new tenants will give the produce of the vineyard in due season (Matt 21:41, 43). The wedding hall will be filled with guests (22:10) but not primarily with those who were initially invited. Rather for those initially invited their city would be burnt (22:7).

France notes that with the burning of the city, judgment falls on everybody including the innocent. The military campaign is a little forced into the story, he says:

> Their presence in the parable adds a ridiculously incongruous touch to the story.[10]

Consequently, it is a community radically revitalized. A new covenant, a new dispensation, a new priesthood, a new law, new teachings and praxes characterize the

new order. New leaders and new regulations emerge. The new covenant does not invalidate the old: rather it reforms it. The Church is the embodiment of the authentic and orthodox faith of Israel, even if it has transcended the ancient religion of Law.[11]

The Church, however, does not succeed Judaism; in that sense it cannot be called: *A New Israel*. The Church was never meant to be a continuation of historical Israel. Rather it is the embodiment of the true and authentic traditions of the Law: a fulfillment of divine promises, and above all a consummate realization of all divine plans for Israel. The Church stands on its feet and has its mission. It has its own *kairos*.

But Luke speaks about a new covenant (Luke 22:20). There is a sense in which we can speak about "A New Israel," "A New People of God." This should not be *understood* chronologically as successive stages in Jewish history—The Call, the Exodus, the Covenant, the Choice of the New Israel—it should rather be understood ontologically: a new people constituted in the blood of Jesus Christ; a new people from all nations under heaven; a community whose Law is love; a trinitarian people. This New Israel is not according to the flesh but according to the spirit. This new dispensation is neither continuity nor discontinuity but rather fulfillment in a most eminent way.

The Church is not the "Remnant" of the Old Testament.[12] The Remnant is what is left over after a calamity or devastation, out of which a new breed is born. This does not apply to the Church because it is the same breed which survives the calamity that constitutes the Remnant. Rather the Church is a community of faith, called and constituted by the blood of the Lamb; a community that believes in Jesus and commits itself to the plan of God as realized in the saving mysteries of Jesus Christ.

Consequently, the Church is the beginning of a new order: the old order has given way to the new. With the death and resurrection of Jesus, the community of salvation has passed from the age of the temple to the age of the Gospel. As God's purposes in salvation, hitherto effected in and through Israel is consummated, a broader and more perfect outreach is created.

It is in this context that the interpretation and application of the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen finds its natural application. The parable was addressed to Jewish leaders who guided and shaped the destiny of Israel. They not only refused to hand over the produce of the vineyard to the owner, they maltreated and killed some of the servants sent to collect he fruits. The climax was that they even killed the beloved son, the heir to the vineyard. In consequence, the owner brought them to a shameful end and leased the vineyard to others who would produce fruit at the appropriate time.

Matthew intends something much more radical than mere change in leadership in Israel. A new community will be born, a new age will dawn, a New Israel will emerge from the old. The membership is neither λάος, which translating עם could

be imagined to signify the Jewish people. Neither is it ἔθνη (plural) which could easily call to mind *the goyim*—Gentiles: rather the vineyard will be leased to an ἔθνος—εθνεσι, whose background would be of little consequence as long as it bears fruit at appropriate times.

Israel is judged by its productivity: the relevance of the new nation, of the new lease is assessed by its ability to deliver fruits. With regard to expectations from the community, there is continuity. While the old dispensation could not function because of its unfruitfulness, expectations are high from the new community, which is believed that, having learnt the lesson of the former community, would now bear fruits under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

7.6 Continuity and Discontinuity in Paul

It will be necessary to conclude thus chapter by studying continuity and discontinuity in Paul. Paul was very proud of his Jewish background. An Israelite, circumcised on the eighth day, he was of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees. He was so zealous for the Law that he persecuted the followers of the Way (Php 3:5–6a; 2 Cor 11:22).

It was not for racial or cultural reasons that Paul appreciated his Jewish background, nor did he attribute any anthropological superiority to being Jewish. This notwithstanding, it was not a matter of indifference to him that he descended from Abraham, σπέρμα Αβραὰμ *sperma Abraam* (2 Cor 11:22). This joy obviously was founded on the Promises made to Abraham and to his descendants.

Paul teaches that there is every advantage in being a Jew. It was to the Jews that God's message was entrusted (Rom 3:2). They were the adopted sons: to them were given the glory, the covenants, the Law and its rituals, and the Promises. They were descended from the Patriarchs and from their flesh and blood came Christ who is above all: God forever blessed (Rom 9:4–5).

Because of the foregoing, the Gospel is God's power saving all who believe—Jews first and Greeks as well (Rom 1:16). Israel kept her privileged position even when unfaithful (Rom 11:2).

Besides reflecting a high esteem for the moral superiority of the Jews, Paul did exhibit what could be called a religious contempt for the godless ways of the Gentiles. The Gentiles were ignorant of God (1 Thes 1:9; 4:5; 1 Cor 12:2). They worshiped images and went after their lower instincts (Rom 1:24). Paul painted a dreadful and dreary picture of Gentile morality, with special references to the vices of his days (Rom 1:26–31). To walk in the way of the Gentiles was to lead a sinful life (Eph 4;17; 1 Thes 4:5; 1 Cor 5:1). Even in his letter to the Galatians, where Paul with all eloquence vindicated the Christian doctrine of justification by faith, and the Christian radical independence on the Law because of Christ, Paul

could not resist the temptation of quoting: "We are born Jews and not Gentile sinners" (2:15).

But all humanity sinned, Jews and Gentiles alike: the Gentiles outside the Law, the Jews within the Law (Rom 2:12–16). In like manner there will be tribulation and distress for any one who does evil: Jews first and the Greeks as well (Rom 2:9). Just as salvation came first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, retribution due to sin will come first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

The Jews sinned, not in violation of nature or of the order of creation, but in transgressions against the Law (Rom 2:17–24). The Jews were sinners and it was their sin within the context of the Law that hardened them against the Gospel. The two peoples, Jews and Gentiles, sinned and provoked God's wrath: the Jews because they did not obey the Gospel; the Gentiles because they do not know God (2 Thes 1:8).

Paul admitted freely that the Jews sinned against the Gospel and we quote in full a Pauline text that contains very harsh language against the Jews:

> For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judea; for you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displeased God and opposed all men by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But God's wrath has come upon them at last (1 Thes 2:14–16).

Paul then goes on to say that the real Jew is not one who is outwardly a Jew, nor is the true circumcision something external and physical. The true Jew is one who is inwardly a Jew and the real circumcision is a matter of the heart; spiritual not physical (Rom 2:28–29). Because of the sins of the Jews, God's name has been blasphemed (Rom 2:24 cfr Ezek 36:20).

Paul is the only New Testament writer who addressed at length the problem of the salvation of the Jews. This concern is borne from the historical fact that the majority of the Jews, despite their election rejected, the Gospel. Many of them, like Paul, aggressively persecuted the Church. They constituted the greatest stumbling block that the Early Church experienced. This made Paul wonder what their place in the Messianic Kingdom was.

Paul's experience of the Jews during his apostolic travels was negative. Although he always gave them pride of place, by preaching the word first to them, their response was cool, then negative, then aggressive: they would not only chase away and even stone Paul and his companions but even took steps to ensure that the Gospel was not preached to the Gentiles. Moreover it could not be said that the Jews were exemplary in observing the Law.

With their frame of mind, their pattern of conduct was repeated town after town, city after city; Paul tried to find out what went wrong and above all attempt a solution. It was the fruit of his reflection into the problem and the solution that he proposed that are found in Romans 9–11.

The problem is delicate. One cannot deny the opposition of the Jews to the Gospel. What could be the reason? Other more important questions are: Can Jews be saved by the Law only, without Jesus? What is the meaning and the importance of Jesus in salvation history?

Will the Jews ever come to believe in Jesus? How will the Promise and the Covenant be understood in the face of Jews negating Jesus? Paul attempts answers which are as follows:

- Paul's sorrow is great and his mental anguish endless: he is even ready to become anathema and be cut off from Christ if that would help his flesh and blood; the historical Israel. God blessed Israel with the Promise, the Covenant, the Rites and Rituals; the climax of all his blessings is Christ Jesus.
- God is faithful to his promises to all the "true" children of Abraham because not all who are physically descended from Abraham are his true progeny. What about Ishmael and Esau? It is only through the true sons of Abraham that the blessings of the Promise and the Covenant are transmitted.
- Though God is faithful to the Promise, He remains perfectly free to choose and call whom he may wish. Through a great act of God's generosity, the Gentiles were found righteous not through their works but through faith, even when they were not searching for righteousness.
- Jews have fervor for God but their zeal for the Law is misguided. Substituting their own righteousness for the righteousness that comes from God, they failed to realize the true meaning of the Law which with Christ, has come to an end.
- Israel has no excuse: it heard God's word, but failed to understand the message and consequently remained disobedient and rebellious.
- God, however, has not rejected his people: his promise is everlasting. Even among the Israelites there is a minority—a remnant that remained faithful. The Jews only stumbled: they did not fall off forever. However, their defection proved an occasion for the Gentiles to be converted. Since they have not fallen off forever, their rising will be momentous and can be compared to rising from the grave.
- Paul goes on to use the metaphor of the olive tree for Israel. This metaphor does not come near in beauty or in concrete description to the parables and other forms of speech found either on the lips of Jesus or in the Old Testament. Israel is the olive and her children are the branches. If the root is

holy, the branches are holy. The branches were cut off so that the *wild olive shoot,* the Gentiles, could be grafted in. This is all God's grace, and no ones' deserts. The Gentiles should tremble with fear, because if God did not spare the natural branches, he is not likely to spare the branches grafted in.

- The Jews defected but only for a while. They were God's enemies but only with regard to the Gospel; but as chosen people, they were still loved by God. God never revokes his gifts. *Eventually the Jews will be converted.*

Paul's theological reflection on the fate of his kinsmen, the only of its kind in the New Testament, is a Gospel of hope. *The Jews will be converted.* Paul prefers to use the image of the olive to that of the vine. It is not easy to guess what his reasons could have been.

My opinion is that in biblical tradition, the vine, as symbol of Israel, has been the symbol of unproductivity, bearing disheartening fruits, doomed to spoil and destruction. The olive, on the other hand, with its sturdy stem and tough branches, brings out more easily the idea of permanence, stability, and endurance. The olive has been known to survive for centuries. They wade more easily the storm of time and weather than the vine. The olive is a tree; the vine is a plant. Above all the olive is more adaptable to grafting.

For Paul, Israel that survived the crucible of the exile, the potter's wheel of the Maccabean and Roman periods, will eventually come to terms with the Gospel in God's good time and duly acknowledge Jesus as the awaited Messiah and *Kyrios*.

For Paul, Israel will survive and bear fruit; her future is bright. Israel, despite her temporary defection, will be converted. Even now, Israel has a remnant, a remnant chosen by divine grace. If a wild olive branch could be grafted to a cultivated olive, how much easier would it be for the natural branch to be grafted to the tree. Hence Israel will return to her God and acknowledge Jesus.

The Church is the vine. Like the vine that took root and filled the country, towering higher than the cedars of Lebanon and covering the mountains, extending its tendrils to the sea and its offshoots to the River (Ps 80:8–11); the Church has spread to the four corners of the earth. Like the vine planted in fertile soil beside flowing rivers, with branches well spread out (Ezek 17:5–7) the Church has not only the capability—nay the mandate—to reach out to all nations. It has the mission to bear fruit, fruit that will last (John 15:16).

The demands made of Israel of the Old Covenant will not be less than the demands made on Israel of the New Covenant, a covenant ratified in the blood of Jesus Christ. The demand to bear fruit is all the more insistent and urgent because time is short (Rev 12:12) and the Lord is nigh (Php 4:5). Moreover, there is a lesson to learn from Israel of old: if God did not spare the natural branches, he is not likely to spare the grafted branches (cfr Rom 11:21).

The Church is the vine, and the vineyard of Yahweh Sebaoth. All the favors and responsibilities of Israel are now with the Church. The challenges are there but divine providence is forever present: "I am with you always, yes to the end of time" (Matt 28:20). The Church has a mission to all humanity—to bear fruit—to yield *soreq* to Yahweh Sebaoth, the Holy One of Israel.

Epilogue

The vineyard of Yahweh Sebaoth is the house of Israel
the men of Judah the chosen plant (Isa 5:7)

This vineyard of Yahweh Sebaoth has had its odyssey in history. Today it comprises the Jewish and the Gentile worlds: those who were apart have been brought together by means of the blood of Jesus. He is the peace, making the two peoples into one and breaking down the barriers which used to keep them apart, i.e., the rules and decrees. He has created a single New Man out of the two by restoring peace. Through this Cross he has united both in a single body. Through Christ, both now share in the same Spirit and the way to the Father. Everybody is now a citizen and member of God's household (Eph 2:13–19).

The Church born in April of A.D. 30 has given and born fruit. It has spread to all the continents of the globe. Evangelism attained unparalleled strides in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The Church has suffered major reverses. Divided by the early Christological heresies, losing great ground to Islam; it has had to reckon with the great Eastern Schism and the Reformation. Buffeted by heresies, torn apart by the scandal of division, it is still plagued by atheism, secularism, and many other philosophical ideologies contrary to her Gospel. Threat to its physical existence has been experienced and continues to be experienced even today through persecutions and some legislations that militate its structural growth.

These are the challenges of the Church in the Jubilee year of 2000 and beyond, into the third millennium. What does the Church learn from the vine/vineyard of the Old Covenant? The threat of unproductivity is very real. Chastisement consequent on fidelity is not remote. The fact that the Church comprises approximately twenty percent of humanity makes her mission real and truly urgent.

Having been well provided for by the Master like the vine in the Canticle of Isaiah (5:1), in Ps. 80 and in the Matthean allegory 21:31–43, the Church has no excuses to give for not bearing fruit.

It means that methods of evangelization have to be studied, revised, and updated to be relevant to the days' needs: dialogue and evangelism have to be pursued; none to the detriment of the other.

The picture changes tremendously in John where Christ teaches that he is the vine. The Church is identified with Christ. The vine grower is no longer the husbandmen but the Heavenly Father. Pruning is a constant daily process. It is by the Church abiding in Christ as Christ abides in the Father, that the Church will surmount all difficulties and incarnate Christ in time and space.

Notes

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